The Premier Magazine of Gaming News, Advance Previews and Accurate Reviews

INTELLIGENT GAMER™

Saturn's Gigantic New Lineup

IG Puts NiGHTS, Tomb Raider, Sonic X-Treme, Virtua Cop 2, Three Dirty Dwarves and More Than 10 Other Hot Titles Through Their First Playable Tests

GAMING'S GREATEST YEAR

E3

Super Mario 64



Nintendo's Biggest Launch

The World's First Hands-On Previews of More Than 10 Nintendo[64] Games

Sonic X-Treme





NiGHTS

Sony Wows Gaming Crowds

First Live Demos of Over 15 PS Games Including Wipeout XL, Crash Bandicoot, Spider and Jumping Flash! 2



Crash Bandicoot



Wipeout XL

First Look

Sega's New Saturn 3-D Control Pad

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DECKER PUBLICATIONS

Nintendo[64] • Saturn • PlayStation • M2 • Arcade • PC • Internet


KEN GRIFFEY, JR.



Better wear gloves for this one. Junior's back with Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run™* baseball.

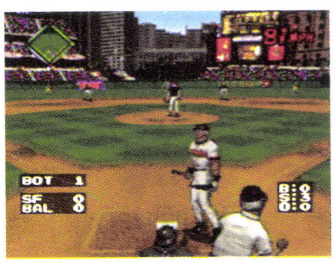
There's bone-crunching wall crashes, super-human slides, turf-eating **dive 'n' grabs** (without those unsightly grass stains). Plus, there's a trading feature and new 3-D rendered ACM graphics. All served up with Ken's **real-life** swing (digitized for your protection).

Looks like another big hit from Ken Griffey Jr.

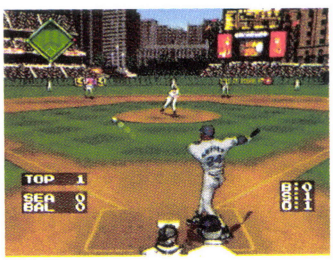
It's as close as you can get to being Ken without having to deal with The Mariner Moose.



So put those other weak baseball games on the permanent disabled list. 'Cause this time, Ken's playing **hardball.**



Here's your chance to break more than a few records.



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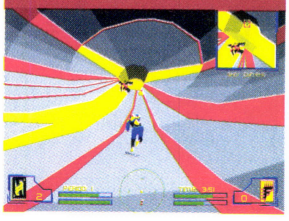
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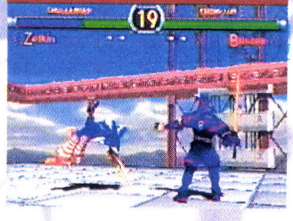
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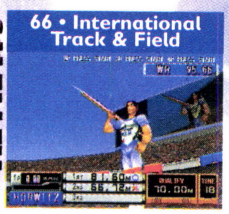


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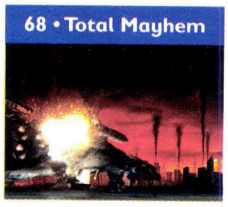


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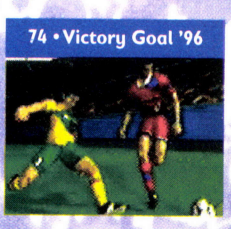
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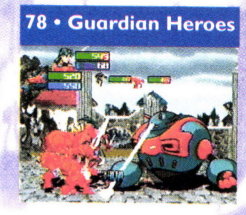
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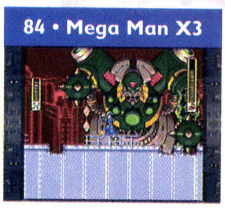
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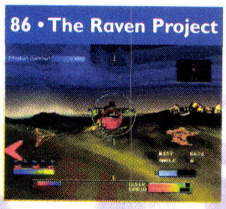
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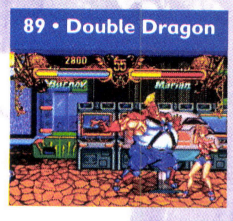
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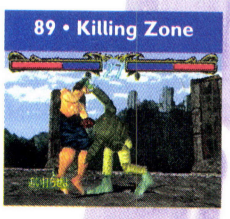
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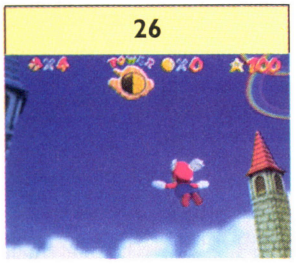
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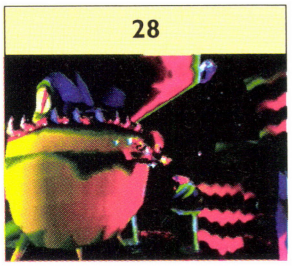
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Nintendo

Nintendo flies out of the gate with the first public U.S. display of their new Nintendo[64] hardware, as well as the first U.S. showing of the best game of the show: Super Mario 64.

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Sega

Sega isn't standing still, with a new price, Internet connectivity, a new Sonic game and a potential new mascot game by the original creator of Sonic in their astounding Nights.

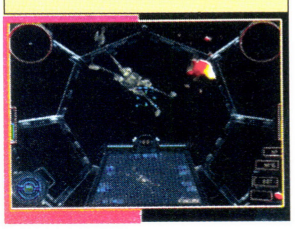
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Sony

Sony continues to defend their current position of 32-Bit dominance, with a $199 price point and hot titles like Crash Bandicoot, Wipeout XL and Tobal No. 1.

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PC/Windows 95:

PC users aren't left out, with first looks at hot new titles from LucasArts, Westwood, Blizzard and Origin. Also, a gander at what appears to be the most powerful 3-D accelerator for the PC: the 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics chipset.

Bringing Games to the Masses



One of the most daunting challenges faced by the games industry today is one which has eluded most corporate strategists, public relations people and journalists alike: The question of how to take a largely isolated but growing hobby and make it as mainstream as other forms of entertainment.

Journalists within the games industry are occasionally surprised at the special perks reserved for members of the mainstream press: A list of the first people to receive review units of Nintendo 64 hardware may, for example, begin with such huge (500,000 or more readers) established games magazines as Electronic Gaming Monthly and finish up with publications such as *USA Today*, *Playboy*, *Rolling Stone* and the *Wall Street Journal*. To the all-important gaming press, which is quite secure in the knowledge that it alone controls the destiny of the marketplace, it's beyond explanation why a bunch of newspapers and big porn or pop culture magazines get copies of games they probably won't even understand.

For large companies, however, the reasoning is clear: A PlayStation thumbs up from *Playboy* might send even more testosterone-charged men into stores than a ringing endorsement from an established games magazine, and so publicity-hungry manufacturers wisely send their products to as many established publications as possible.

While entertainment technology advances, however, mainstream publications have become increasingly incapable of describing the essence of the modern gaming experience to laymen unconcerned with polygons, MIP-mapping and anti-aliasing; they're stuck repeating phrases such as "twice as powerful as x-Bit machines" and "more realistic graphics and sounds." The average consumer most likely has little idea as to what differentiates today's games from yesterday's, and why a Nintendo 64, PlayStation or Saturn must be purchased if he or she wants to play the best new software.

As journalists and enthusiasts, we have to define for our readers just what, in plain English terms, differentiates 32- and 64-Bit games from their predecessors, and second, we have to look toward broadening the industry past its current borders.

Part of the solution is that we just have to remain mindful of the fact that there are some people who are just looking for simple fun and not a million confusing options, and (as Square attempted in Japan with Final Fantasy IV and FF4 "Easy Type") companies should attempt to differentiate in their marketing campaigns between games made for masters and those made for the general, less experienced population.

From a wider perspective, gaming has failed to take hold of the general population partially because even the industry tends to look at electronic gaming as the continual pursuit of the new and exciting rather than the expansion, maintenance and publicizing of large catalogs of products. In the videotaped motion-picture industry, old black-and-white movies and even those with outdated themes fluctuate in price but still remain in stores.

Herein lies the key to broadening this industry's appeal: Interactive entertainment is available for every hobby from bass fishing to casino gambling to Olympic basketball to horse racing, and the price spectrum is such at the moment that anyone with 20 dollars can afford to buy at least an old game system and cartridge. For new games to succeed, companies have to start delivering more affordable games, explore hitherto undertapped genres, and begin to draw in more customers from the greater population at large.

Though we all want to see electronic gaming expand and become more complex and immersive, it would be patently foolish of us to ignore the enormous potential for its broader expansion as a more popular form of entertainment. If gaming is to break through from hobby status to something more, it's time to start conceiving of this business as more than just a bunch of men making games for young, teenaged and twenty-something guys.

- Jer Horwitz, Editor-in-Chief

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Against a dark and shifting 3-D landscape, the warriors of the twisted underworld known as BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN 2™ await your return. How do they know you'll be back? Let's just say it's a *gut* feeling. As in the first 360° go-round, the moves are lethal, the stages visceral and the characters, wicked. And this time, the original avengers are joined by a new crew of fighters. Like Tracy, the sexy cop gone bad; Gaia, merciless madman; and Chaos, a friendly fella who happens to swing a sickle. All of 'em real keen to get to know you better. On every level.

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PlayStation

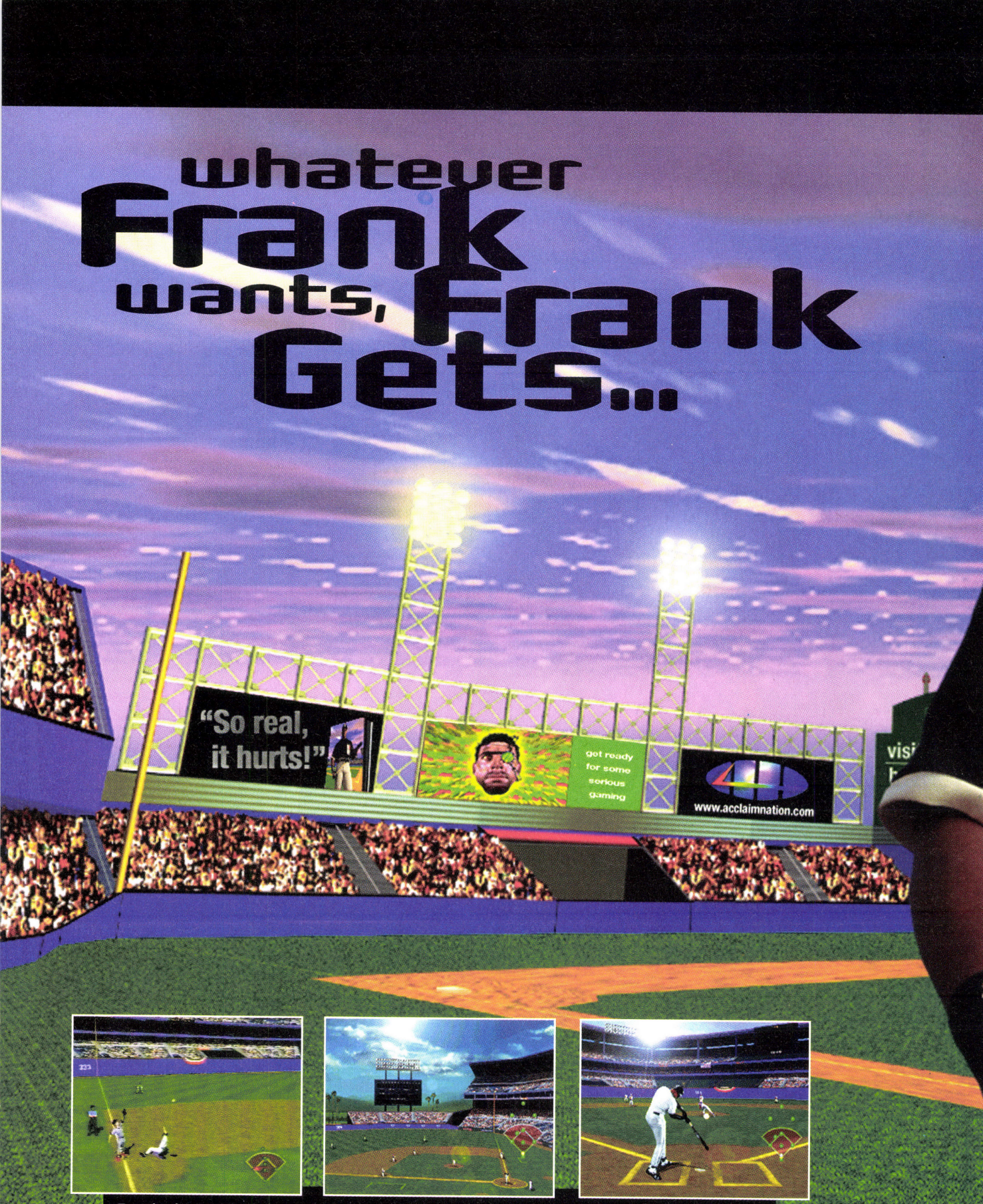
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whatever Frank wants, Frank Gets...



Frank demanded motion-captured fielding and computer-rendered perfection before he would unleash his home run power!

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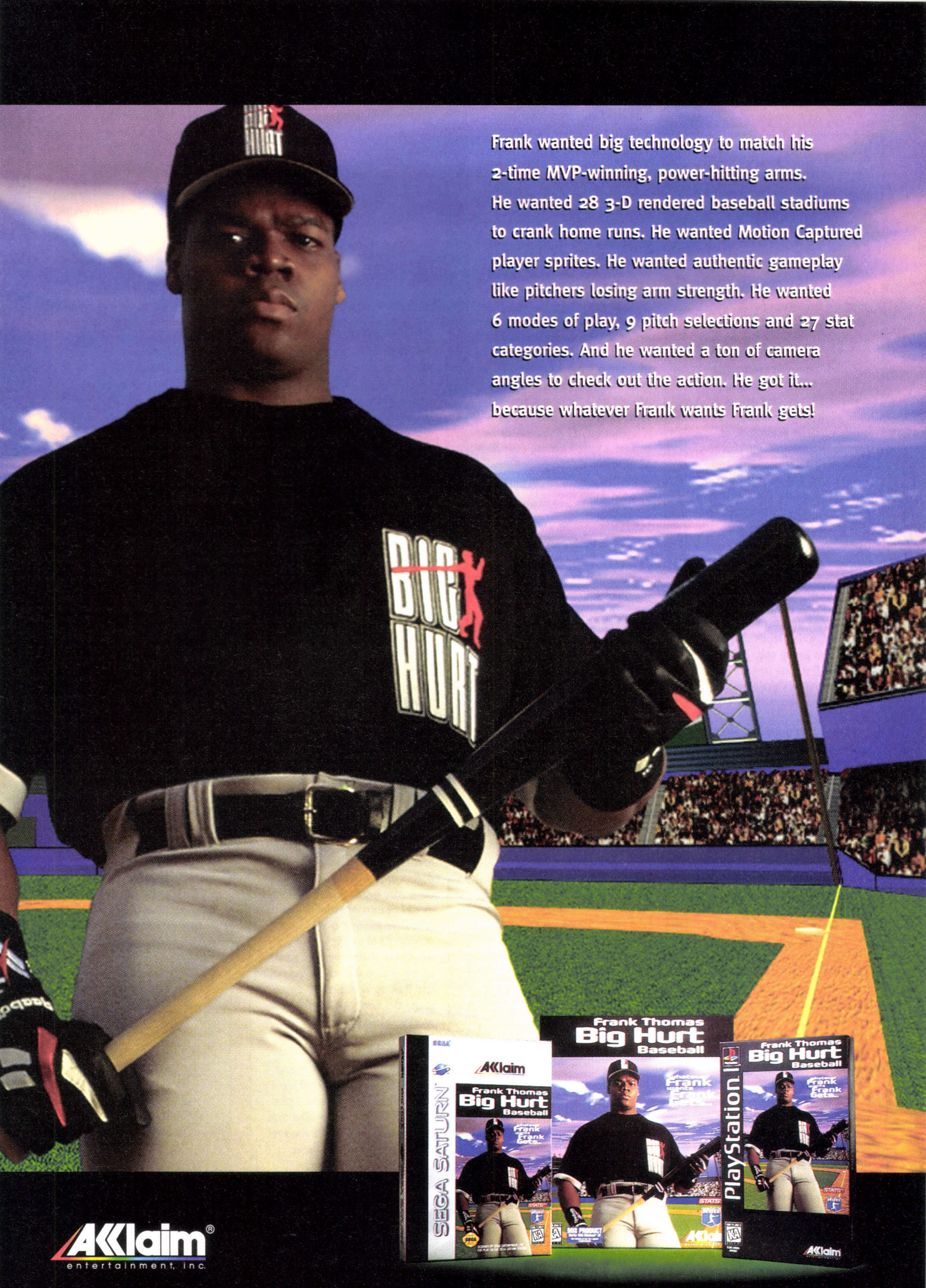
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Frank wanted big technology to match his 2-time MVP-winning, power-hitting arms. He wanted 28 3-D rendered baseball stadiums to crank home runs. He wanted Motion Captured player sprites. He wanted authentic gameplay like pitchers losing arm strength. He wanted 6 modes of play, 9 pitch selections and 27 stat categories. And he wanted a ton of camera angles to check out the action. He got it... because whatever Frank wants Frank gets!
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Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball
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entertainment, inc.

I want my hand-drawn graphics!

IG,

Way back when polygon, rendered, motion-captured and digitized graphics appeared, I thought that they were really cool. Today, I pine for the days of hand-drawn graphics; that's right, good old two-dimensional, some-human (not-a-computer)-drew-it graphics.

What really irks me about the so-called "new generation of games" is that their graphics aren't really new, and neither is their gameplay, but that's another letter. I mean, look at Loaded—the graphics in that game are poor; the moment you zoom in, the picture gets completely blocky! It's like I'm playing with my Commodore 64 (not to be confused with the Nintendo 64). Let's face it: Polygons don't work too well for many types of games. Certainly, they're about the only choice for driving games, but why are so many action games using those awful polygons? Rendered graphics are also pretty sad. DKC was great the first time around, and then the graphics got boring... there was no personality in them at all.

Personally, I think that hand-drawn graphics convey way more "style" and "flair" than any polygon/rendered art. I just thought I'd vent that out. Perhaps titles like VF3 and KI2 are going to change my mind, but right now, I'm going to be cynical.

Kwang Suh
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

[Ed.: Relative to hand-drawn artwork, rendered and polygonal artwork are still in their infancy; most 3-D artists today attempt to create realistic renditions of what exists or 3-D versions of previously 2-D cartoon artwork. Few 3-D game artists have attempted to be Picassos, Dalis or Eschers, as it's far easier within large game companies to be a Michelangelo or a Tex Avery. Give the industry some time to catch up to the new technology.]

Bring Tradition Back

IG,

I'm pissed off. I hope the games industry comes to a business-shattering collapse, as it did in 1984, and people start standing up for the games that they really want instead of making due with 3-D rendered, polygonized games.

Whatever happened to games that you could play over and over again and never get tired of? What happened to games with originality and a great story?

Who cares which system is the best? Who cares how many 16-, 32- or 64-Bit RISC processors are in a machine? Who cares how many polygons you can put on a frame per second? Where are the games?

I want games. Someone, or anyone, please ease my pain. To all of the game companies, I say to you: Give me great games or give me death.

Jeremy Bayless
Stockbridge, Georgia

Segagodzilla

IG,

Will Sega own the world? All of Sega's recent dealings with other companies has to mean something. Sega is slowly planning to conquer the entire world of video gaming. Virtuality, Panasonic, Dreamworks, LucasArts, Konami and other companies are currently in the works with Sega, and you have to wonder what Sega is doing. Soon they will trample on Sony and wipe their shoes on the president. Think about it!

Dan John
Oakville, Ontario, Canada

[Ed.: *IG*'s Magic 8-Ball (given to us as a gift by a former Sega employee) says: "My sources say no." Go figure.]

Enlarging the Market

IG,

I'm a technical manager type who has played computer games since Adventure and Zork were first available on main frames. I currently own a Sony PlayStation and a Sega Genesis.

I'm writing because I believe the video game industry has not yet tapped into the potential of drawing older gamers into the market. I have a few thoughts on this.

First of all, get rid of the myth that the older player doesn't like fast, action-oriented games. We do. We just have less time than younger folks to develop the skills. The solution is for programmers to focus on using the existing skills adults already have in game settings. For example, Wipeout is a fairly easy game for older players since the playability has been based on models of real physics and therefore one can use existing skills that have already been developed in real life.

To me, the most exciting thing about computer games is the ability to experience something that would be too hard, too dangerous or just plain impossible to do in real life. So forget trying to model human interactions—you only have to leave the house to do that. I'd like to fight in a weightless environment, or stand on the frozen surface of Europa and look up at Jupiter, or tunnel under the Earth, or travel in time or alternate universes. The possibilities are only limited by the imagination.

We now have truly amazing game technology. The next big breakthrough will happen when game manufacturers realize that there is a vast untapped market of mature gamers out there, hungry for new adventures.

Henry Harris
Pasadena, CA

Bidding Adieu to Square

IG,

For the past few years, I have been enjoying games made by SquareSoft and for obvious reasons I have always played these games on my SNES. When I heard about the release of the Nintendo 64, I was very excited about the new system, as was a friend of mine, and we were both planning to purchase the new system when it was released along with Final Fantasy VII when it comes out, but then I found out that Square is not planning to make the game for Nintendo.

Instead, I found out that the game is to come out on Sony's PlayStation. I have nothing against Sony, but I feel that Square would make more of a profit with the Nintendo 64 system, as I always thought that there have been more people who respect the Nintendo name than any other. I would not mind so much if the game were to be made for both systems, but this completely changes my views toward Square. It is my belief that both Nintendo and Square will lose.

Jason Pfaff
Shippenville, PA

[Ed. Evidently Square feels differently. Rumors of a sweetheart deal between Square and Sony began to spread only moments after the companies announced that the two-disc Japanese Final Fantasy VII would sell for 5800 yen, the same price that most one-disc games sell for in Japan. Now, as Sony itself prepares to handle the U.S. publishing of at least one of Square's games, there may be more at play here than most people realize.]

April Foolz

IG,

First of all, I would like to say that I have enjoyed reading your magazine, and that it is definitely one of the best. In your April issue on Page 37, you made a parody of Game Fan, and while I found it extremely funny and got a lot of enjoyment out of reading it, I would hope you would not participate in the wars that video game magazines tend to get into. From Game Fan to EGM and Game Players to GamePro, it has been commonplace for magazines to try and trash each other in an effort to make themselves look superior. But, as most adults would agree, all this does is make them look childish. From reading Fusion, I have come to the conclusion that you have no intent to be childish, and this parody simply represents the views of most gamers as we see every day on Usenet newsgroups.

Why can't everyone just give their own opinion and leave it at that? Thanks, and keep up the good work.

David Zdyrko
Dover, DE

[Ed.: April Fools' Day was the best occasion we could think of to publish a parody, but (in keeping with *IG* Online's traditions) we will promise not to joke about another magazine in so biting a manner in the future. Having said that, here's an answer to your question that you're unlikely to see elsewhere, as we're going to attempt to actually explain why it is that most magazines waste so much time bashing each other and criticizing each others' reviews.

Plenty of things happen behind the scenes of various magazines that never make it into "official" print, and most readers never become aware of such events. In one rare incident of private material going public, the original printing error we parodied in our April Fools section of *Fusion* was followed by an unapologetic official release which appeared on the Internet. Reading their release would lead the average reader to believe that another magazine's "sabotage" had caused the offensive text to appear, rather than blaming the actual person on the magazine's production staff who had inserted that text as filler until the real contents arrived.

Magazines slug it out because of inaccuracies—sometimes perceived ones—and many subtle printed or grapevine-style gossiped comments which mean little to the average reader and apparently more to the magazines' staffs. If there's a grand inaccuracy floating around in the press, it's our job to point it out, but that's the extent to which we'll become involved in these sorts of controversies.]

Retraction

In the May issue of Intelligent Gamer, we erroneously reported that VR Soccer '96 did not allow any curve to be put on the ball when kicked, and that the referees called an inadequate amount of fouls during gameplay. We have learned that VR Soccer does indeed allow "english" to be put on the ball, and the amount of fouls can be changed depending on the referee that you select to call the game. We apologize for these errors, and hope that you can adjust IG's rating accordingly.

Send your questions to:
IG Communications,

by e-mail ***at iglee@aol.com,***
subject line: Communications

or *by mail at*
1920 Highland Avenue, Suite 222
Lombard, IL 60148



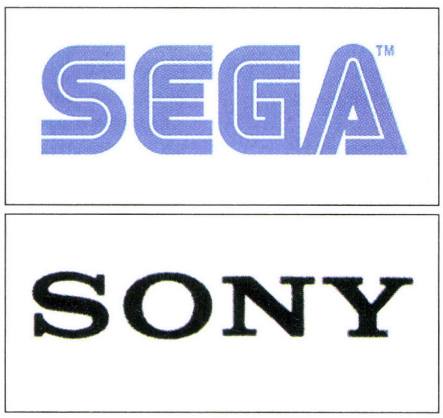
High-end gaming hits the

Mainstream

The buzz at E³ this year had much to do with the corporate movements of the three big players: Nintendo, Sega and Sony, with regards to their pricing and marketing strategies. Many expected Sega to make the first move by dropping the price of their Saturn to $199 in an attempt to win over gamers who still perceived the Sony PlayStation as the cheaper of the two machines, despite the pre-E³ Saturn price of $249. In addition, $199 is generally accepted to be the "magical" price point at which a game system becomes a mass-market item.

As it turned out, it was Sony who would strike the first blow. At a round-table conference on the first day of E³, Jim Whims, executive vice president of Sony Computer Entertainment of America, announced that the Sony PlayStation price would drop to $199 effective immediately.

At first, Sega appeared to had been caught flatfooted, since they had shown finished televisions spots the previous night at their party spotlighting their $249 price. As it turned out, Sega was waiting for Sony to make their move. It only took one day for Sega to respond in kind, with a press release and a sticker on every kiosk in the Sega booth trumpeting that they had dropped their price to match Sony's.



▲ In the continuing battle for system dominance, both Sega and Sony have dropped the price of their 32-Bit systems to an extremely affordable $199.

Nintendo, on the other hand, announced that they will be sticking to their original pricing strategy of releasing the Nintendo 64 for $249. The surprise came when it was announced that the $249 price would include one controller, and no pack-in game, which historically has never happened with a Nintendo launch.

Nintendo also announced that its games will be priced between $49.99 and $89.99, with all of the launch titles clocking in at $69.99, with the exception of the $79.99 Shadows of the Empire.

This effectively prices the Nintendo 64 at $320 for a system with one controller, which is considerably more expensive than the $250 or so that a PlayStation or Saturn with one game would cost.

Sega and Sony also have announced different strategies with respect to their software. Sega has announced a new lower pricing scale, with titles falling between $29.99 for a game like Baku Baku Animal and $69.99 for a flagship title like Nights, which will come with the new Sega 3D control pad packed in.

While Sony didn't make a similarly exciting announcement regarding their pricing, they did say that they would be moving toward standard jewel cases instead of the large, clunky cases that have been used for CD-ROM console games since the days of the Sega CD.

Sony Plays With Fire

7th Level, a company best known for titles like Monty Python's Complete Waste of Time, and its forthcoming Ace Ventura: Pet Detective, has announced that its subsidiary, a company called PyroTechnix, will be developing 3-D games for both Windows95 and the Sony PlayStation.

PyroTechnix' Sony PlayStation games will be released under the Sony Interactive Studio label, much the way that SingleTrac, developer of Twisted Metal and Warhawk, handles their distribution.

In addition, PyroTechnix' True3D development tools have been licensed by Sony for use in their own 3-D game development.

John Smedley, a producer at Sony Interactive, stated that, "PyroTechnix may well have the most comprehensive support for critical game development requirements of any 3-D system currently available for Pentium-based PCs."

This, of course, implies that Sony will be entering into the PC market much the way that Sega has with their SegaPC division.

While 7th Level has not been known for their 3-D prowess, their PyroTechnix division is the product of an acquisition that took place in February of this year.

Bye, Bye L.A.

The Interactive Digital Software Association, the sponsors of E³, have announced that they will be packing their bags and heading to Atlanta from June 19 through June 21 to hold the 1997 Electronic Entertainment Expo. While the event has been held at the L.A. Convention Center for the last two years, the E³ has finally outgrown the facilities in Los Angeles.

Douglas Lowenstein, president of the IDSA, stated that, "...E³ has grown dramatically in its two-year life and the move to Atlanta, site of the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, will give us flexibility to continue to meet the expanding needs of our exhibitors, as well as accommodate new companies seeking entry into the show."

The 1997 E³ will be held at the Georgia World Congress Center, which boasts 9,000 rooms in 16 hotels within walking distance, and 55,000 rooms in 340 hotels for the entire city of Atlanta. Atlanta has spent $1.3 billion on improving its hospitality business in preparation for this year's Olympic Games, which makes it a logical choice of venue for a show of E³'s expanding scale.

To give you an idea of just how big E³ has gotten, the 1996 show held recently in L.A.



▲ The Electronic Entertainment Expo, held at the L.A. Convention Center for the last two years, is moving to the site of the 1996 Olympics: Atlanta, Georgia.

featured 400 companies, who exhibited on over 490,000 square feet of exhibition space. This is in itself 35 percent more space than used by the 1995 E³ show last May.

In the years previous to the foundation of E³, video games had been featured at the Consumer Electronics Show, which was held twice a year. At the CES shows, however, video games were showcased alongside other consumer electronics. After the first E³ last year, the Summer CES ceased to exist due to a lack of interest. This year, however, there are other shows for video games, despite the fact that the major industry players will not be attending those shows in favor of E³.

Nintendo Hosts Super Mario RPG Camp

Anxious to educate the press about the subtleties of role-playing games, Nintendo of America recently hosted a press event called Camp RPG, where a group of reporters spent a day at Nintendo playing Super Mario RPG and listening to talks by Nintendo executives.

The event opened with Nintendo of America development manager Dan Owsen discussing the history of RPGs. According to Owsen, the genre began as Old World Pen-and-Paper war games, a form of entertainment that first appeared sometime between 1600 and 1800. These continued to evolve, eventually emerging as Dungeons and Dragons by Gary Gygax in the mid-'70s.

Owsen stated that there is no special element that separates adventure games from RPGs, noting that "RPGs usually emphasize a story line and character development. They typically take place in fantasy settings." He says that Super Mario RPG is not a pure RPG because "it has lots of action elements."



▲ Despite the name, Super Mario RPG is not a pure RPG, as it incorporates elements previously found only in action and fighting games as integral parts of its combat system.

Depending on how you define the RPG genre, the first RPG for the Nintendo Entertainment System was either The Legend of Zelda, published in 1987, or Ultima Exodus, translated from the PC to the NES, in 1989, by FCI. Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior were two of the biggest RPGs for the NES.

The next speaker was Yoshi Tsuboike, Nintendo publications manager, who tried to explain why RPGs are more popular in Japan than in the United States. To put this in perspective, Enix's Dragon Quest (Dragon Warrior for the NES) sold about 800,000 copies in the U.S. By comparison, the sixth game in the same series (which never came out in the U.S.) sold over 3.5 million copies of the game in six months.



▲ Nintendo is hoping that the impact of the rendered visuals and the action elements of Super Mario RPG will draw in American players who have traditionally shunned role-playing games.

Another example is Super Mario RPG. Nintendo sold over 700,000 copies of the game in Japan. By contrast, a Nintendo executive quietly admitted that he will be satisfied if the company sells between 250,000 and 500,000 copies in the United States.

"In the United States, older players prefer action and sports games," Tsuboike pointed out. "In Japan, it is all right for adults to play fantasy games. I am 38 years old and I play DragonQuest."

According to Tsuboike, adult comics and illustrated novels are accepted art forms in Japan. "Many of the famous creators of comics are involved in creating RPGs." One reason Japanese RPGs have not caught on better with American audiences, Tsuboike explained, is the process of translation. "Translating the humor is a very difficult point. It takes two years to develop an RPG game and fine-tune the text. The average length of time given to translate games to English is about a month."

The next speaker was Gail Tilden, Nintendo publications director. According to Tilden, most RPG players need a little help to complete their games. "We just finished a survey and found that approximately 80 percent of RPG enthusiasts subscribe to a game enthusiast's magazine, and 84 percent use a player's guide."

Tilden says that RPG is a tough term to define. For purposes of classification, Nintendo publications include RPGs and adventure games in a catch-all category she refers to as "epic games." According to Tilden, epic games hold gamers' attentions for extended periods. The Legend of Zelda, A Link to the Past is a good example. Though it was published in 1991, people still write to *Nintendo Power* asking for hints and help beating the game. In fact, Nintendo game counselors still receive approximately 1,000 calls a month about the original Legend of Zelda.

Sega of Japan Announces Investment in America and Europe

A lot of activity has been going on at Sega recently, what with the recent Saturn price drops in the U.S., Japan and the UK, and the formation of several new divisions within Sega. Along with those developments comes the news that Sega of Japan recently announced that it would be exercising more control over the American branch of the company. In a recent interview published in the Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Sega of Japan has announced plans to invest 15 billion yen to assist Sega of America. In addition, Sega Europe Ltd. will be receiving 8.2 billion yen as well. The reason cited for the renewed investment is reduced demand.

Of course, along with the money will likely come a tightening of the reins. Over the last few months we've been hearing stories about SOA's reduced autonomy, so this latest announcement seems to be a logical progression of this cycle of events. It should also be noted that Sega Europe Ltd. will become a direct subsidiary of Sega Enterprises following this investment.

Square Changes Incentives

Square, developer of the wildly popular Final Fantasy series as well as the publisher of the forthcoming 3-D fighter Tobal No. 1, has announced that its Japanese teams will be paid according to how well their games do in the marketplace.

This is quite unusual, but certainly provides quite a bit of incentive to produce a killer title for the company. A designer who creates a game that sells over three million units will be paid with an annual income of 100 million yen, which is roughly one million dollars.

There are 20 in-house development teams, each staffed with 30-150 people. Bonuses will be distributed to each team, with the team leader divvying up the money according to each team member's merit.

For a million-seller game, Square will pay its team 200 million yen (roughly $2 million), 500 million yen ($5 million) if sales top two million, and 900 million yen ($9 million) for those teams whose games sell over three million copies.

For a three-million seller, the maximum an individual on the team could make in one year would be approximately 80-90 million yen ($800,000-900,000).

Although those on the Final Fantasy 7 team are almost assured of making some pretty healthy bonuses, very few games actually sell over three million units.



▲ Under the new system, Square employees will be paid based on how well their game does in the marketplace. This means that those employees working on the Final Fantasy 7 team are probably in a very good position for a sizable bonus next year...

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Atari Laid Bare

A story that we here at *IG* have been chronicling for several months is the collapse of Atari. The company line is that they are still supporting their beleaguered Jaguar system, but financial documents released to their stockholders would appear to indicate otherwise.

Apparently, Atari has not placed an order to manufacture new Jaguar systems since summer of last year, and has no additional plans to pursue any further Jaguar manufacturing. This jibes with the firesale pricing observed lately, with new Jaguars selling for as little as $49.99. Even so, Atari states in the report that, "...there can be no assurance that...inventory can



▲ Since its introduction in 1993, the Jaguar has been vainly struggling for market acceptance.

be sold at current prices..." and that "...Despite its substantially lower retail price, sales of Jaguar continue to be disappointing..."

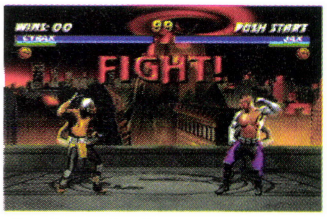
An interesting twist in Atari's 10-K filing is the admission that "...despite the significant commitment of financial resources that were devoted to the Jaguar and related products, it was unlikely that Jaguar would ever become a broadly accepted video game console or that Jaguar technology would be broadly accepted by software title developers." Atari attributed the Jaguar's poor showing to software development delays and the release of the PlayStation and Saturn.

This, and other competition from Nintendo and 3DO, has caused Atari to acknowledge that, "...Most of Atari's competitors have greater experience and expertise in 3-D graphics and multimedia technology and have substantially greater engineering, marketing and financial resources than Atari."

Atari has also been known as a highly litigious company in the past, as it has been a healthy source of income for the company. Atari is currently involved in several lawsuits, both as a plaintiff and as a defendant. As a plaintiff, Atari is involved in suits against Phillips Laser Magnetic Storage, presumably because Phillips failed to deliver goods to Atari for their JagCD, and also in a suit against Probe and Acclaim, possibly with regards to a Mortal Kombat game that never materialized. Atari is a defendant in a case involving supplier Citizen America, who is seeking $900,000 in damages for an alleged breach of contract. In addition, Tradewell, a New York company, is suing Atari for damages in the neighborhood of $1.6 million. Atari has filed countersuits in both cases.

The report also reveals who has investments in Atari. The Tramiels own 43.1% of Atari, with other major shareholders including Time Warner with 13.6% and Sega Holdings USA with 7.4%. It should be noted that Sega's holdings are the result of a court case in late 1994 in which Sega agreed to invest $40 million in Atari, as well as cross-license of some of its titles. While Jaguar owners never benefitted directly from this agreement, Sega has recently released a multi-game cartridge featuring Atari classics.

Another item of interest are the details behind Atari's merger with JTS Corporation, whose primary business is selling hard drives, most notably in a 3" size which is between the standard 2.5" notebook drive and the 3.5" desktop



▲ Acclaim and Probe are defendants in a lawsuit filed by Atari, possibly over a Mortal Kombat game that never surfaced.

drive. The post-merger company will carry the JTS name, and Atari's Jack Tramiel and Michael Rosenberg will hold seats on JTS' board of directors.

The fact that the company would practically drop the Atari name does not make it appear as if the newly merged JTS Corp. will be very involved in the video game arena. Historically, Jack Tramiel has never been particularly fond of the video game console market.

Acclaim Invests in Nichimen Graphics Inc.

Acclaim Entertainment has announced that some of its proprietary development tools will be released to other companies via Nichimen Graphics Inc.'s N-World animation creation tools. Acclaim's most significant contribution to the N-World suite is apparently their cross-platform development code, which will make a game developed on N-World compatible with all of the supported platforms, without having to rewrite the code for each different system. Other Acclaim-developed sections are the 3-D character engine, which has been in development in-house at Acclaim for over three years, and a color reduction model, allowing full-scale rendered graphics to have their palette and thus their memory requirements reduced.

Along with this news is the announcement that Acclaim will be investing in NGI and plans to acquire a 12.5% share in the company. Nichimen Graphics Inc, a subsidiary of $60 billion Nichimen Corp., provides graphics development toolkits to the industry. Lately, Nintendo has been working closely with NGI on development for the Nintendo 64; so closely, in fact, that NGI and Nintendo will be providing the N-World kit to all of the Nintendo 64 developers.

Acclaim's role in this is not unsurprising, given the losses they have posted while bowing out of the once-lucrative 16-Bit cartridge market. For Acclaim to leverage their proprietary development tools to generate income certainly makes sense in their planned return to profitability.

Sony: It's A Raid!

The Japanese Fair Trade Commission recently raided the offices of Sony Computer Entertainment of Japan, in a price-fixing investigation.



▲ Sony Computer Entertainment of Japan has allegedly been threatening retailers in a bid to keep the price of their Sony PlayStation inflated, rather than letting competition dictate the cost.

The allegations stem from a 5,800 yen discount program designed to spur sales of the PlayStation. Apparently, Sony reportedly ordered retailers not to comply with the terms of the discount in order to keep PlayStation prices at a fixed level.

Retailers had their flyers and advertisements checked by Sony, and allegedly threatened retailers who did offer a discount on the PlayStation with a freeze on their software supply.

According to sources within the Japanese video game software industry, there is currently a glut of software, making profitability difficult.

Sony Computer Entertainment officials declined comment, but did say that they would fully cooperate with the ongoing investigation.

While these tactics do happen in the Japanese marketplace, legislation is in place to attempt to protect the consumer, in the form of their Antimonopoly Law.

Readers with sharp memories will recall a similar situation in the U.S. where Nintendo was caught price-fixing their popular NES game system. In that case, Nintendo reportedly threatened to cut off supply for retailers who lowered their prices or carried competing products.

At the conclusion of that investigation, Nintendo was merely ordered to offer $5 coupons towards their 8-Bit software, a very gentle slap on the wrist considering that the punishment most likely increased software sales. In addition, Nintendo was not required to admit guilt toward their actions.

Ironically, the announcement of the raid came not long after system prices in Japan dropped to 19,800 yen for the Sega Saturn with one controller and 24,800 yen for a PlayStation with two controllers and one memory card.

It will most likely be several months before the FTC closes the case and releases their findings.



IG Shorts

Sega GameWorks, a newly formed joint venture between Sega, Dreamworks and MCA, has just made a deal with Toronto-based **Cineplex Odeon** to put Sega-developed video games and VR simulators into Cineplex' interactive game centers. The centers, which will be named Cinescape and placed next to Cineplex Odeon movie theaters, will be the product of an estimated $10 million that Cineplex plans to invest.

■ Compaq Computer has announced that they will be building the PowerVR 3D chipset into their new Presario home computers that will be shipping later this year. PowerVR, which was covered in the May issue of *IGF*, was jointly developed by NEC and Videologic.

■ Sega has also announced involvement in a forum designed to promote a new storage media standard. Sega, along with four other companies, are endorsing a new technology called SSFDC (Solid-state Floppy Disk Card) which is an ultra-thin non-volatile storage medium. Measuring 45 x 37 x .76mm, and weighing only 1.8 grams, an SSFDC is even thinner than a credit card. Apparently, Sega is considering the use of the SSFDC technology in their arcade games, similar to the Neo•Geo's memory card.

■ Square has announced that Tomoyuki Takechi will be taking the helm of the company. The former president, Tetsuo Mizuno, will hold the title of chairman with representative rights.

■ Interplay, publisher of the successful multiplayer game Descent, has announced that it is getting its feet wet in the burgeoning Internet online games service market with a new division called Engage, which has announced a partnership with AOL.

■ Phylon has announced the availability of a software v.34 upgrade for all modems using the PHY2000 chipset, like Eiger Labs' HeadOn modem. The upgrade is available at http://www.phylon.com/tech-supp/upgrades/modemfax.htm.

■ Edge International has announced the release of an arcade-quality joystick compatible with SNES, PlayStation and Saturn. The joystick features programmability and rapid-fire functions, and has a unique modular design. Pricing is $129.99 for a joystick with one module, and $34.99 for additional modules. Interested parties should call (808) 848-8603.

HOT top ten...

IG counts down the best of this month's games...



CURRENT RELEASE TOP 10

1. **Iron Storm**
   Working Designs / Saturn
2. **Guardian Heroes**
   Sega / Saturn
3. **Super Mario RPG**
   Nintendo / Super NES
4. **Panzer Dragoon Zwei**
   Sega / Saturn
5. **Night Warriors: Darkstalkers' Revenge**
   Capcom / Saturn
6. **Command & Conquer**
   Westwood / PC-CD
7. **Wipeout**
   Psygnosis / PS & Saturn
8. **NBA Shoot Out**
   Sony CE / PlayStation
9. **Street Fighter Alpha**
   Capcom / PS & Saturn
10. **Duke Nukem 3D**
    Apogee / PC-CD



ARCADE GAMES

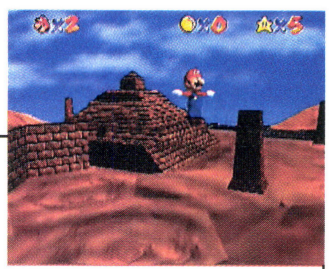
1. **Tekken 2**
   Namco
2. **Soul Edge**
   Namco
3. **Golden Tee 3D Golf**
   Incredible Technologies
4. **Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3**
   Midway
5. **Mortal Kombat 3**
   Midway
6. **Open Ice**
   Midway
7. **Marvel Super Heroes**
   Capcom
8. **Neo Turf Masters**
   SNK
9. **Viper**
   Fabtek
10. **Toshinden 2**
    Capcom

Courtesy of RePlay Magazine, May 1996



EDITORS' MOST WANTED

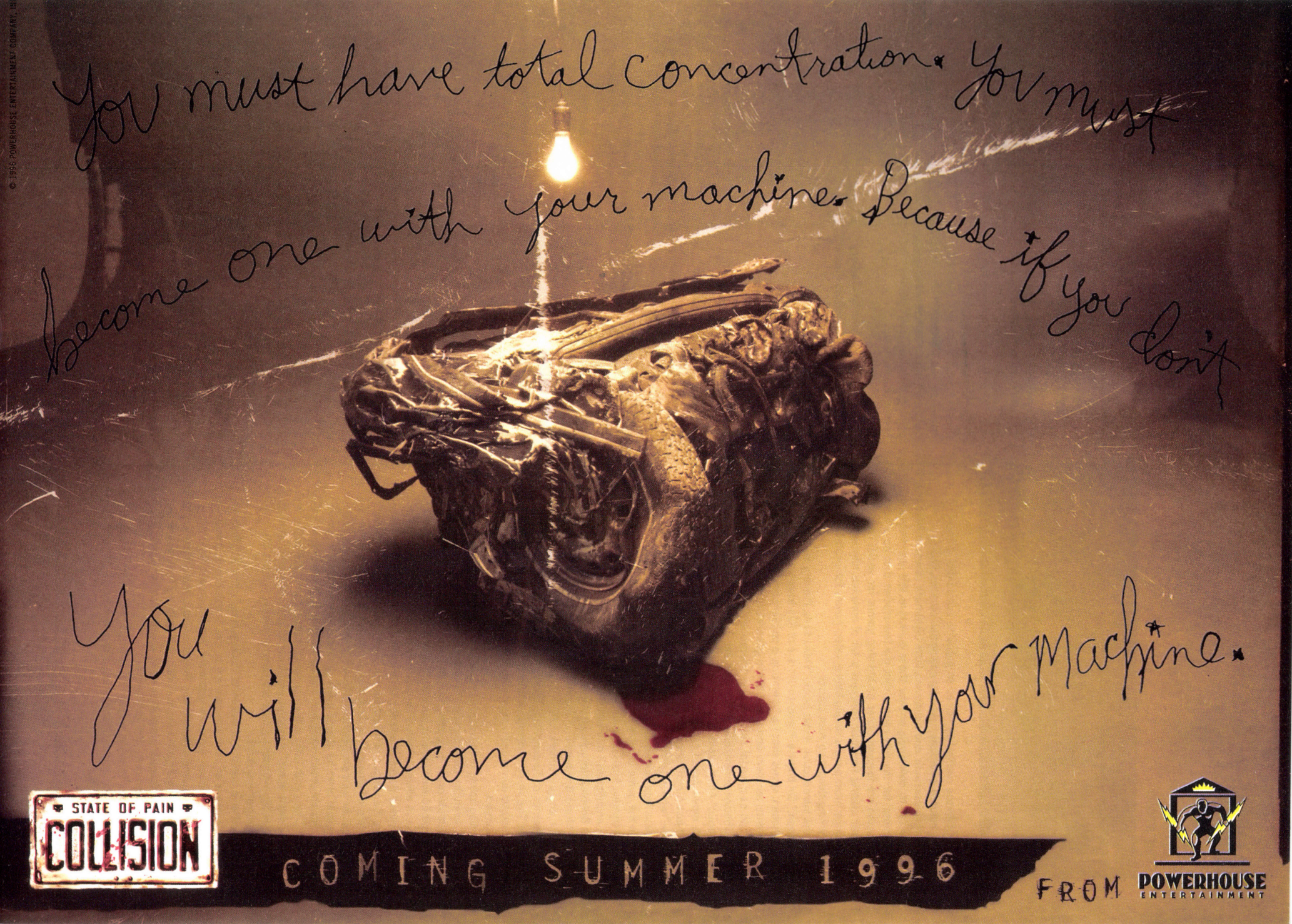
1. **Super Mario 64**
   Nintendo / Nintendo64
2. **TetrisPhear**
   Nintendo / Nintendo64
3. **Nights**
   Sega / Saturn
4. **Wipeout XL**
   Psygnosis / PlayStation
5. **PilotWings 64**
   Nintendo / Nintendo64
6. **Street Fighter Alpha II**
   Capcom / PS & Saturn
7. **Dark Savior**
   Sega / Saturn
8. **Final Fantasy VII**
   Square / PlayStation
9. **Daytona USA C.C. Edition**
   Sega / Saturn
10. **Sonic X-Treme**
    Sega / Saturn



1996 E³ SHOW TOP 10

1. **Super Mario 64**
   Nintendo / Nintendo64
2. **Nights**
   Sega / Saturn
3. **PilotWings 64**
   Nintendo / Nintendo64
4. **Wipeout XL**
   Psygnosis / PlayStation
5. **Spider**
   BMG Interactive / PS & Saturn
6. **Dark Savior**
   Sega / Saturn
7. **Tomb Raider**
   U.S. Gold / PS & Saturn
8. **Heart of Darkness**
   Sega / Saturn
9. **Madden NFL 97**
   Electronic Arts / PlayStation
10. **Formula 1**
    Psygnosis / PlayStation

Bill Schimel (sch19@charlie.webserve.net)



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THE STORY

This issue's *IG* Advocacy deals with the possible ill effects of electronic gameplaying on children and young adults. Based on the story we published last month about a Japanese study of supposedly game-related maladies afflicting junior high school students, we received the letter (at right) from Jeremy Guillory.

IG ADVOCACY RESPONSE

While the media has helped to publicize substantial games-related questions asked by concerned parents, health professionals and politicians, little legitimate research has been conducted to definitively answer those questions. We use the word 'legitimate' for the sole reason that the few studies that have been conducted are focused either on blaming games for social ills or giving their clearly simplistic concepts a set of complex, almost Freudian meanings; most people simply blame video games for problems without looking deeper to root causes.

In the introduction to his book, "Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo," Dr. Eugene Provenzo Jr., one of *IG*'s favorite pseudo gaming scholars, states that his "intention is to alert researchers, as well as parents, teachers and the public in general, to the power of Nintendo as a social, cultural and educational phenomenon, and to gain a better understanding of what the 'world of Nintendo' is actually about." After explaining the true purpose of *The Wizard*, the Fred Savage movie based on a boy entering a video game competition (it wasn't just a marketing tool; it was a movie about a boy's quest to become "whole"), Provenzo goes on to describe "the ability to achieve a maximum number of 'head butts'" as a "goal that is pursued in the game Double Dragon," Martin Klein's claim that "video games largely focus around oral sadomasochistic fantasies of the fear of engulfment," and violent video games including Blades of Steel, Bubble Bobble, Nobunaga's Ambition, Who Framed Roger Rabbit?, Super Mario Brothers and Tecmo Bowl. Provenzo's book is a must-read for anyone suffering from Beavis and Butt-head's delusion that (in reference to *Jurassic Park*) if the story came from a book, it must be true. The work of ersatz scholars is compounded by the fact that they tend to quote each other when writing more books on the same subject.

Dealing solely with issues of physical illnesses directly caused by games, even the most thorough researchers would be hard pressed to find multiple press accounts in Japan, North America or other regions of the globe that parents have complained about their children suffering from ill effects of game exposure. In a Nov. 13, 1994 article in the *Buffalo News' Buffalo Magazine*, Charles Anzalone wrote that Jason Murphy, the subject of his article on "Game Boys," suffered from game-related illness. "The first time Jason played Mortal Kombat II he got sick...he was over-excited from anticipation. He was hot and sweaty, and after he played a few games, Jason felt as if he would vomit. His shoulders were hot, and he went into the restroom feeling all sick. Then, with only a few games of Mortal Kombat II under his belt, he went home." At worst, game critics can show that some people get really worked up over standing or sitting in front of televisions or monitors.

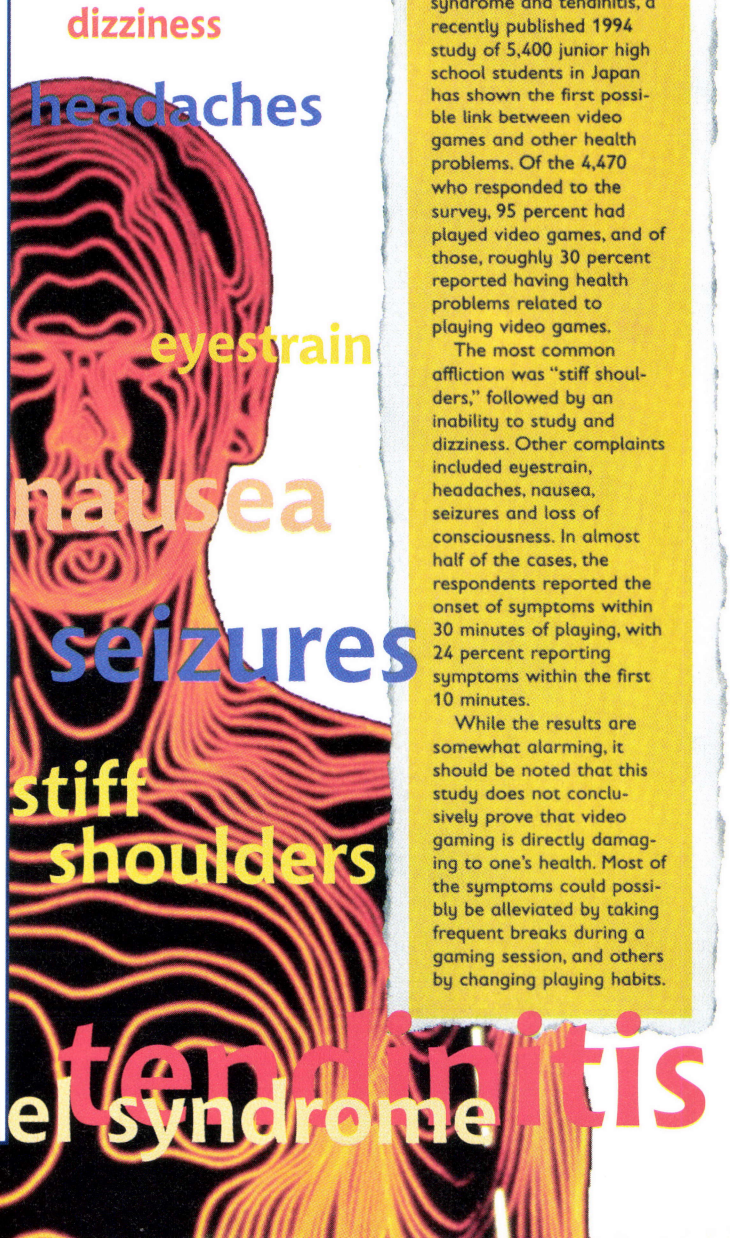
Whether a handful of individuals infrequently suffer ill effects from gameplaying is of minimum concern to the population at large—as was the case when someone years ago reported suffering from seizures every time *Entertainment Tonight* co-host Mary Hart appeared on television, there is no more evidence that Mary Hart causes seizures than there is proof that video games distort players' brainwaves or legitimately induce illnesses.

The obvious solution for the few affected people: Stay away from flickering video images and try not to turn book and magazine pages too quickly. IG

IG,

I just read the article about video games affecting kids (giving them headaches, seizures, etc.) and I think it's ridiculous. I mean, how can a game affect people any more than a regular TV program? It's still the same screen, only something different is projected onto it. And that part about kids blacking out—how is it possible? If they can't even handle a little video gaming, then they don't belong near a television set.

Jeremy Guillory
Kodiak, Alaska



Japanese Report Slams Games

While it is fairly common knowledge that repetitive motion can cause injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome and tendinitis, a recently published 1994 study of 5,400 junior high school students in Japan has shown the first possible link between video games and other health problems. Of the 4,470 who responded to the survey, 95 percent had played video games, and of those, roughly 30 percent reported having health problems related to playing video games.

The most common affliction was "stiff shoulders," followed by an inability to study and dizziness. Other complaints included eyestrain, headaches, nausea, seizures and loss of consciousness. In almost half of the cases, the respondents reported the onset of symptoms within 30 minutes of playing, with 24 percent reporting symptoms within the first 10 minutes.

While the results are somewhat alarming, it should be noted that this study does not conclusively prove that video gaming is directly damaging to one's health. Most of the symptoms could possibly be alleviated by taking frequent breaks during a gaming session, and others by changing playing habits.

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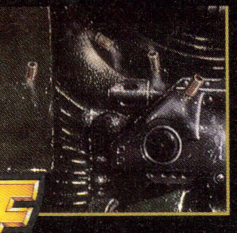


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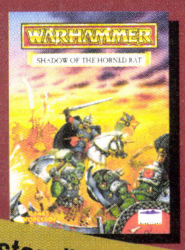
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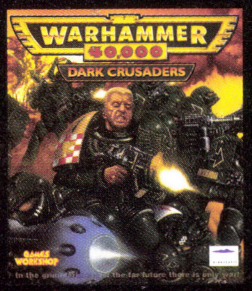
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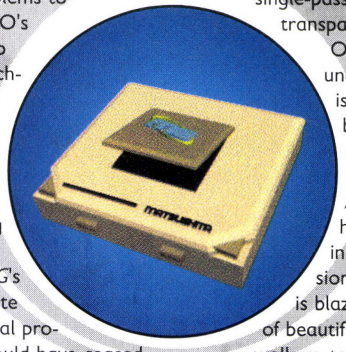
IG OVERHEARD

M2 Software

All has been quiet on M2's Eastern front, and that's enough to worry many people who were just beginning to gain confidence in Matsushita's chances to make their machine a major contender in the next round of system battles.

Why should a period of silence worry anyone before a new system launch? Because we're not talking about silence between Matsushita and the public—developers aren't getting any of the integral technical support they routinely require to develop games for a new system. To the average person, this might mean nothing at the moment, but imagine what sorts of problems are caused when someone is supposed to program for a brand-new machine architecture and comes across a program-stopping bug in the chipset and is armed with only pages of sketchy documentation. Coding either ceases or the developer needs to spend days figuring ways around the problem. In a more organized corporate structure, specialists would be manning telephones every day and providing assistance and bug fixes to developers.

Why did this happen? The 3DO Company was handling all technical support for M2 developers up until the finalization of their contract with Matsushita, at which point Matsushita assumed responsibility for handling developer questions. Without a team in place to do this, Matsushita has left many developers in the cold for support. In response, some key licensed developers have apparently put a freeze on M2 development, notably including Interplay's Descent 2 M2 team, and 3DO is said to be waiting for Matsushita to sense enough third-party problems to extend 3DO's contract to provide technical support.



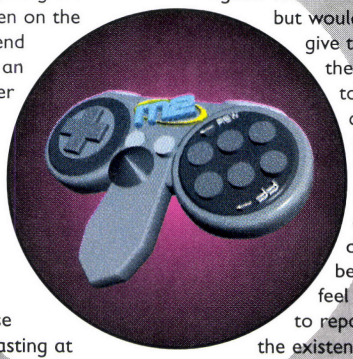
While development is proceeding on many M2 titles, *IG*'s sources note that internal production would have ceased altogether if it was not for binding contracts between Studio 3DO and Matsushita for the former company to provide software of which obscures the fact that several impressive game concepts are under way at the Studio in attempts to give the company a foothold in three key genres. The first title, Army Men, is said to be Studio 3DO's answer to the Command and Conquer craze, increasing the arcade-style action influences and focusing heavily on where you place your men on the field. The premise: You spend part of the game driving an armored personnel carrier through battlefields, dropping off soldiers, giving them orders, and then allowing the game's AI to create wartime interactions between your men and enemy forces. As you let men out, you get to cruise around the war zones blasting at things in your truck.

Rush is the company's improved take on the Road Rash craze, emphasizing (as did Sony Interactive in one segment of their ESPN Extreme Games PlayStation title) rollerblading. More exciting is an action title currently code-named G3 (after designer Greg Gorsiski's third effort for 3DO behind Jurassic Park Interactive and Blade Force)—while still early in conceptual stages, the premise is to take a solid 2-D action-platform title along the lines of Elevator Action, Impossible Mission and the like, polygonize all of the characters and backgrounds, and then move the camera around strategically to improve the visual appeal of the world.

A fourth title is the variously named "IMSA Racing"/"M2 Racing"/"insert-Ridge-Racer-sounding-title here," which is progressing nicely with an ovular track and a couple of cars laid out and moving already. Based on a type of racing largely unexplored in home console titles to date, IMSA's cars are based on actual high-performance designs featuring bodies largely similar to the Acura NSX and single-passenger aerodynamic transparent enclosed cockpits.

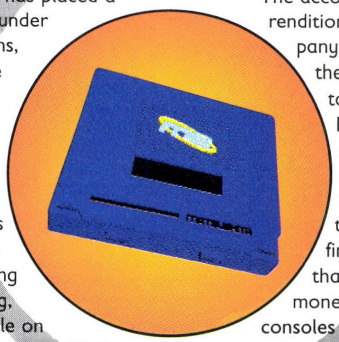
One exceptional title under development off site is what is being described by *IG* sources as the first-ever virtual-reality RPG, Power Crystal. According to those who have witnessed the game in motion, the early version of the graphics engine is blazingly fast despite its use of beautiful visual effects: You can walk up to the shore line of a river or lake and see glimmering translucent water splashing the shoreline without polygon breakup, and you can then look into the water and see pebbles and sedimentary rocks in the basin.

Totally unconfirmed: Word has it that Capcom is now involved in a clandestine pact with Matsushita to develop Street Fighter 3 for the M2—as mentioned in *IG*'s *Fusion* issue 10, Capcom supposedly has been working on a 3-D fighter for the machine, but would they give the M2 the sequel to the company's flagship? We find it extremely difficult to believe, but feel obligated to report on the existence of such a rumor regardless.



Other M2 news of note:

Continuing to refine their controller design, Matsushita has added several new features to the controller we revealed some months ago, planning for future M2 use as a DVD machine. Rather than opting to have less buttons anywhere than Nintendo 64 controllers possess, Matsushita has gone back to having a six-button spread on the controller's right face and has added new OS instructions to deal with the newly standardized features. In addition, the company has placed a "jog shuttle" under the six buttons, flush with the face of the controller—jog shuttles are routinely used on modern VCRs to do precise fast forwarding and rewinding, and the shuttle on the M2 controller will help to eliminate the need for an additional DVD remote control. A trigger has also been added to the underside of the controller's center, allowing the analog thumbpad to have its own flightstick-style fire button.



In hardware news, discussion continues to persist on the subject of whether or not the final version of the M2 will include dual PowerPC 602 chips in an effort to minimize the hardware's current polygon processing bottleneck. As prices on the chips have fallen to $15 and a "piggyback" mode is said to be possible (whereby two 602 processors are placed directly on top of each other), Matsushita is said to be seriously considering the option.

Interesting twist relating to 3DO's MX chipsets: The current concept being tossed around is the idea of actually including the video RAM frame buffer within the actual MX chipset rather than externally—as transferring data from separate RAM chips to the math processors is one of the most vital time delays in any computer or game console, having the RAM bundled with the fast MX chipset would mean incredible speedups in processing. Developers claim that such an MX chipset could deliver—believe it or not—15-20 million polygon per second performance.

The drawback? The failure rate of such combined chips could be prohibitively high—between the RAM and the high-intensity math processor, the chips could fail in production at a rate of 20 percent or greater depending on how much RAM was included on a chip. Regardless, the premise is food for thought and some additional RAM may well wind up in the final MX design.

Finally, 3DO's pet project at the moment is "Wintergreen," their Internet exploration group, which has been evaluating various measures to get involved in online gaming and find ways to charge for online service. What's the best business model? That's the company's newest pursuit, and they're hiring 40 people to develop their next generation of entertainment.

The accompanying artist's renditions are based on a company meeting's showing of the current working prototype form of the Matsushita M2 console, and include both the current color scheme and what is expected to be the machine's final appearance. Rather than spending extra money to dye the prototype consoles black or gray, the manufacturers opted to use the natural plastic color (pinkish skin tone) for their early machines. Rumor has it that Matsushita is planning to release the final machine in a deep shade of navy blue. The large M2 and Matsushita logos are simply our artist's conceptual additions to give a more accurate representation of what to expect the final to look like.

Features of note: A clam-style top-loading CD-ROM, two DB-9 (nine-pin) joypad inputs, at least one slot for PCMCIA cards (currently on the machine's rear, to the right of the machine when it's facing forward), and two small triangular buttons—one on the machine's front left which turns the power on and off, one on the right which opens the lid. IG

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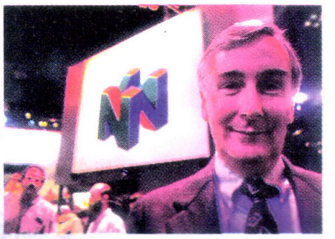
Journalists love to believe that the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo shows are staged solely to impress them, but in actuality, there's a much different motive behind the setting up and maintenance of huge booths full of public relations people and company executives: Game companies are looking to win the confidence of the nation's notoriously conservative top retail chains, which include the likes of Wal*Mart, Target, Sears and what were formerly known as "the Three Sisters:" The Electronics Boutique, Babbages, and Software Etc., all three of which have individually slipped a bit in the "industry power" rankings over time.

But which is the most important retailer? According to game companies, it's Toys 'R Us, who alone often account for 40-50 percent of a game vendor's business. Meetings with any vendor can be full of surprises: Companies might suddenly inform you that they're not intending to carry your products or have been out of stock for several crucial months and somehow forgot to call and let you know so that you could fill the demand. Sega, for example, lost its Kay Bee Toys Saturn account when the Kay Bee crowd decided to carry only the PlayStation and Nintendo[64] for the holidays. The crew from the all-important "Toys," as they're known, is privy to all sorts of special back-door demonstrations, advance previews and news, receives extraordinary treatment at game companies' parties, and gets to negotiate with incredible power to receive new and return unsold products. Negotiations with these chains are so critical to game companies that changes in prices (such as PlayStation $299 to $199 price drops or Saturn $399 to $299 to $249 to $199 drops) all but mandate full discussions with and approvals of retailers in advance, a bureaucratic step which impedes knee-jerk price-matching responses from game companies.

What are the retailers betting on for the 1996 holidays? Major chains such as Toys 'R Us and Electronics Boutique were said to have been extremely impressed by Sega's Nights and Nintendo's Super Mario 64 and Pilotwings, but as the stores are in it for the profit and not for the fun of playing games, they were more taken by Sega's ability to deliver mass quantities of NiGHTS software and 3-D Control Pad hardware than they were with Nintendo's ability to barely squeeze out enough machines to dent initial demand. Waiting lines, after all, do not equal sales, and the chains are projecting that Nintendo might only deliver between 100,000 to 200,000 machines to North America in time for the holidays—they also forecast an allocation of 10 percent of those machines to the Canadian marketplace.

So, with that said, sit back and take an early glimpse at *Intelligent Gamer's* picks for the most exciting and noteworthy titles of 1996. We just can't wait to get our hands on all the hot products coming in September, October, November and December of this year.





Nintendo's Chairman, Howard Lincoln, is obviously a very happy man, but will his "dream machine" fulfill Nintendo's great expectations in terms of sales? He sure thinks so.

The new console war



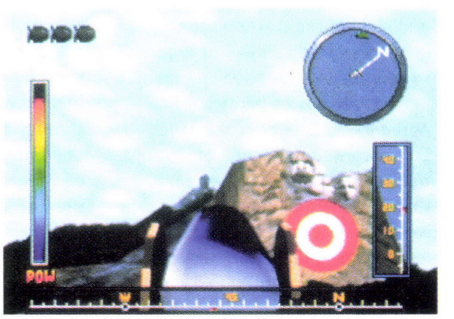
began and ended for Nintendo on Wednesday, May 15, a day which many journalists from around the world will remember as their first exposure to live Nintendo[64] hardware. Is Nintendo's fight for market domination really over so quickly? It appears that the answer is yes, and for moderately interesting reasons.

Depending on whether you believe that Nintendo has been somewhat disorganized or cynically manipulating the media for the past couple of years, your take on the following events could be different. The facts are these: After promising a worldwide launch of the Nintendo (Ultra) 64 hardware in the fall of 1995, Nintendo delayed the Japanese launch to April 1996 and scrapped plans for a simultaneous U.S. launch, pushing back the U.S. release date to the last day of September 1996. A few months thereafter, Nintendo decided to delay the Japanese launch again, this time until the end of June 1996, and after promising demonstration hardware to Japanese stores for the first of June, then delayed even the demonstration date by a couple of weeks to the middle of the month.

If you believe the disorganization theory, Nintendo honestly intended to have products in consumers' hands by the end of last year, but repeatedly miscalculated the time it would take to get enough machines to market and slipped in signing key developers who could have provided plenty of new games for the hardware. If, on the other hand, you believe that Nintendo manipulated the media, the company knew all along that it would be unable to bring its new toy to shelves until mid- to late-1996, and with that knowledge never bothered to ready advertising campaigns or secure the wide variety of developers and products they needed until late in the process. The facts seem to point to a combination of both theories and both third and fourth problems: Nintendo seriously underestimated the distaste that publishers would have for dealing with cartridge-based inventory, and lost out on the opportunity to recruit many of the budding talents whose products put both Sega and Sony hardware on the map. They also bet on a chip manufacturing technology which demands special facilities (owned by few companies in the world) and has a relatively high failure rate, yielding scores of imperfect chips that could never be used to make new machines. For every three chips that are fine, one chip won't work, and thus it takes longer to crank out hardware that can be sold.

Nintendo now faces a daunting challenge: They've developed a game system with awesome visual power and a few games that even their competitors will quietly admit are incredible, and there are simply too few machines to go around. By the end of April, the Japanese market had already received more than 500,000 reservations for the new N[64] hardware, and orders are expected to build steadily until and even after the June 23 date of release there. Nintendo has pledged to have but 500,000 machines ready by the end of June (with another 500,000 by the end of the year), which means that the notoriously long waiting lines for new Nintendo products will no doubt dissipate with some people leaving happy, others leaving empty-handed, and still others buying PlayStations or Saturns instead. For the North American market, Nintendo has pledged to have 500,000 machines ready by the end of their fiscal year (March 31), with 250,000 here before the end of 1996 and 250,000 thereafter.

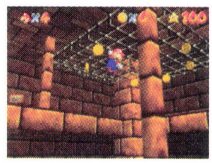
All of this means that Nintendo is facing a huge shortfall of supply for their best products ever, and that they can afford to launch the machine in the United States at a relatively high price for Nintendo hardware—$249.95 without any software, with Super Mario 64 available separately at $69.95—without worrying that any of their units would remain unsold. Will they lower their price to match Sega and Sony's $200 stickers? Very unlikely: Why get even more people (those who could afford the machine at a lower price) excited about waiting in line for your product when you know well in advance that there won't be enough to go around anyway? The consequence *IG* foresees: If Nintendo holds firm to their Sept. 30 North American launch date, the N[64] will instantly be snatched up by enthusiastic gamers and only the luckiest children and mass-market consumers will have a chance at getting the machine. Therefore, Nintendo's greatest Mario title ever will largely miss younger audiences here initially. Such is life.



One of the first games demonstrated at the Nintendo pre-show press conference, PilotWings 64 drew lots of "oohs" and "ahhs" from members of the media with its amazing visuals.

Super Mario 64







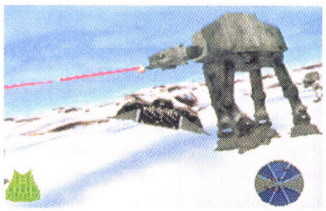
Cruis'n USA

Having proven that the Nintendo[64] can deliver better-than-arcade quality gaming experiences when the arcade technology is moderately powerful (Killer Instinct 64), Williams has done a nearly straight port of the Cruis'n USA arcade game to the home market without adding many frills (options and end-of-race screens look ever-so-slightly better). While not on par with the arcade version of Daytona USA and not using many of the N[64]'s specialized graphics features, Cruis'n USA juggles a large enough number of cars and background graphics on screen at the same time that other home drivers have still not pulled off in the last two years. Control perfection and lasting power were difficult to measure at the show, but the visuals were definitely quite good for a home system.



Wave Race 64

Though only a single level was on display, what was shown of Wave Race 64 was already looking and playing like a star Nintendo game. Originally shown as a boat racing title, WR64's vehicles have become jet skis as Nintendo has opted to use player crafts which better convey the range of motions that water-borne transports go through. WR64's gameplay concept is simple: Ride through obstacle-laden watery courses and slalom left and right as you're told, catching air as you use waves to vault over spiked balls. A nice-looking split-screen Two-player Competitive Mode was also on display.



Shadows of the Empire

Months of building up Shadows of the Empire as a world-class multiengine Star Wars title may have hurt some people's first impressions of LucasArts' first N[64] game, which suffered mainly from having extremely non-linear objectives and wide-open places to explore. In one level *IG* played, you take control of a snow speeder as it tears through AT-ATs and AT-STs in the landscapes of Hoth, takes out radars and generators, and gets an opportunity to fly without restriction through a healthy segment of airspace; another places you in control of a new Millennium Falcon-like spacecraft in TIE Fighter outer-space combat, while two others used your choice of first- or third-person perspectives in Dark Forces-like levels for romps through a Hoth base and sewers.

On the bright side, Shadows' enemy characters and scenes looked as if they had come straight out of the movies, and what explosions and animations were there were just fine if not really neat. On the other hand, the intensity level was relatively low, but tighter control, more (and more clearly defined) objectives and increased use of special effects could make any of these levels of Shadows into winners, but they seemed largely incomplete and untweaked when we tried them. One level we've not seen but have heard about, places your rebel on top of a realtime moving transport train (in early cinema serial style), and other stages carry you through familiar Return of the Jedi and Empire Strikes Back locales, all of which have us excited for the future.



There's little doubt that many people will begin or end their Mario 64 stories by writing that words cannot describe the experience. It's our job to try.

Super Mario 64 has won *Intelligent Gamer's* Best of Show award for two reasons: First, it tackles a variety of programming tasks that hundreds of developers have previously said were incredibly difficult if not insurmountable, and second, it's incredibly fun. In the past, Mario titles have rarely been the former and always been the latter, but SM64 is mind-blowing for its genre in a way that transcends our current definitions of impressive.

For more than 10 years, Mario has been restricted to running left and right through flat worlds, and somehow Shigeru Miyamoto and his Mario Team have made every Super Mario adventure unique and fun. In the first Super Mario game, you could find mushrooms to grow large, open hidden beanstalks to climb to the clouds, swim through underwater obstacles, walk off of the screen to find hidden warp zones, and change into costumes which gave your humble plumber entirely new powers. Since then, Mario has learned to fly, climb fences, ride animals, carry objects and discover new worlds which are hidden in obscure places.

On Sept. 30, you'll begin a Mario adventure in a world which has no left and right edges, hides incredible secrets in the most brilliant places, and challenges you to tackle obstacles far larger than ever before. The sheer size and scope of each Mario level will constantly force you to wonder if you could possibly have found every secret, especially when you realize that simply standing in the right spot and looking at the sun could enable you to sprout wings and fly up through the clouds. A block on the floor will slide open to reveal a vast underground complex in need of exploration; a pond will become an outlet to a huge hidden stream; pictures on the walls become gateways to new levels and huge animated animals will challenge you to fight or race for access to their treasures. Super Mario 64 is a brilliantly conceived beginner's odyssey into the world of virtual reality, made fun enough and mysterious enough that any action could lead to a hidden reward or a gentle slap on Mario's rear end, just enough

NO SHOW

TetrisPhear: We wanted to see it so badly. It just wasn't there. Allegedly anxious to avoid any possibility that a competitor could rush out a quick knock-off or similar product, Nintendo opted not to show TetrisPhear at E[3] and instead save it as a surprise title for either the first month of their Japanese release or perhaps some time thereafter. In a nod to Canadian development house H2O, which has been slavishly working on the title for years, Nintendo did acknowledge the game's existence officially and admit that it was a forthcoming N64 game. Progress, finally...?



Mission: Impossible

After snagging the $1 million rights to produce a game based on Paramount's *Mission: Impossible* movie (starring Tom Cruise), Ocean decided against developing an N64 Waterworld title and opted instead to release the "spy simulation" MI exclusively for a year on the N64 (PC and PSX versions to follow). The strategy-laden first- and third-person game has both arcade elements and realistic moments, whereby the artificial intelligence makes it difficult to bust into a room and suddenly take out all of the people who have drawn their guns, as enemies will be able to hear you coming from down the hall. While early in development (~20 percent), Mission: Impossible is planned as a multi-player title where 007-style gadgets (two-way glasses, fountain dart pens and explosive bubble gum) can be used and booby traps can be left in the rooms of mansions, military compounds and other buildings, and the developers even intend to leave in a nostalgic reference to Epyx's classic Impossible Mission pie chart-style maps. What *IG* saw in an invite-only preview was extremely promising.



to make you work harder the next time and come back for more.

The words virtual reality are used because you're given full control over an on-screen alter ego, namely Mario, who has been given literally so many different possible actions that you could not compile them in an hour of playing and writing everything down. He leaps up and grabs onto the sides of mountains with his gloves. He dives into oceans and pries open submerged treasure chests. He opens locked doors by pulling huge (oversized) keys from his pockets, lifting them into grand locks and using his entire body to twist the latches open. And those aren't even the best parts. Using the N64's analog controller to move Mario, he begins by walking just a little, steps up to a brisk walk, then a jog, then a full run all by simply moving left, right, up or down in varying degrees with your thumb. With one button, he vaults into the air, and with another, he comes down in an improved version of Yoshi's butt slam technique from Yoshi's Island. Combining the buttons, Mario can do backflips and spiraling jumps, and with a third button, he throws tiny defensive punches and kicks which can be combined with his jumping moves. If that wasn't enough, you can have Mario jump into trees, climb them and balance off of their tips with one arm, or go hand-over-hand on chain-link fences, or walk through walls with a special transparency power-up. You can make Mario do what you would want to do in a fantasy world.

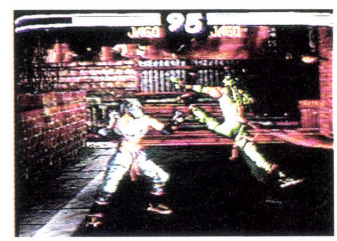
Combine all of the aforementioned elements with perfectly fluid animation, nearly zero pixelization, vivid coloring and intelligent camera motions, and you have a game which is visually pioneering enough that running around in a circle with the new controller is actually fun to watch and control, believe it or not. Add CD-quality (but still happy-go-lucky) music and Mario-style fitting sound effects, and you have Super Mario 64.

Something has to be said to gamers so jaded or narrowly focused that nothing with the Mario name could ever be impressive: There's nothing here that will change your mind. Go back to waiting for a new Madden to come out. For any sane-minded gamer, Super Mario 64 is nothing short of an overwhelming experience, as it not only outperforms any 1996 competition in versatility but does so from the first moment you take control of the title character. The world's finest developers have said that it's close to impossible to give players a fun experience when they're allowed unlimited movement in fully 3-D worlds, and they've all been proved wrong thanks to Shigeru Miyamoto and his team at Nintendo.



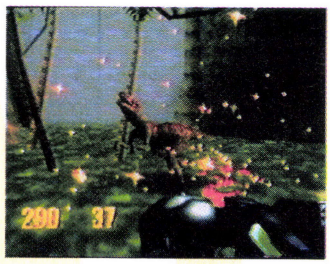
PilotWings 64

If you look really closely at the photos of PilotWings 64, you might just get an early grasp on the game's incredible content. The basic premise from Nintendo's SNES PilotWings title is unchanged: You take several vehicles through flying hoops and other targets while navigating your player through rotating and scaling 3-D worlds. What makes PW64 special are an amazing attention to graphic detail and level of refined control which eliminate any doubts that the Paradigm-Nintendo collaboration could produce a sequel better than the earlier endeavor. Paradigm's 3-D expertise has given PW64 incredible terrain and special effects, including fully animated island theme parks and cities to fly through and over, as well as incredible fiery and water-displacement explosions when you use cruise missiles to take out in-game targets. That's right: Some of the missions let you take control of an attack gyrocopter armed with missiles, which can be launched at ferris wheels to produce big bangs or into the ocean to create hitherto inconceivably realistic splashes of exploding water, and every piece of the worlds—from waterfalls to transparent jet streams to city lights—comes alive with 3-D animation. PW64 is an essential play experience for any fan of 3-D simulations.



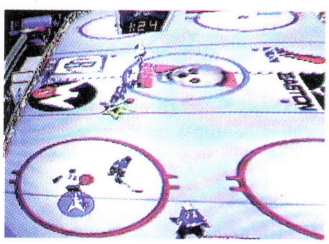
KI64

Surprising everybody outside of Nintendo's N64 Treehouse team (the producers and testers responsible for handling games such as Donkey Kong Country and Killer Instinct), Killer Instinct 64 was not only shown on video tape but also appeared as one of Nintendo's handful of playable N64 titles. The premise: Most of KI2's characters will return and three new ones will appear in entirely new fully three-dimensional backgrounds which rotate, zoom and change in vivid antialiased 60 FPS update speeds. (Combo, Fulgore and Tusk's backgrounds were all in the game, bringing an urban city street, a futuristic museum and brilliantly shaded Stonehenge into three dimensions.) Though the show version was slapped together by quickly porting Killer Instinct 2's characters into a small number of new 3-D graphic environments, extra character animation frames are being prerendered to allow the camera to move around the players during throws, combo attacks and other predefined circumstances. Even Nintendo's KI guru Ken Lobb was blown away by the combination of 2-D character sprites and 3-D backgrounds, which *IG* cannot help but describe as one of the most impressive arcade-to-home improvements we've seen to date. Lobb noted that the finished backgrounds will be full of breakable objects and secrets to discover.



Turok: Dinosaur Hunter

Aside from the one or two lines written in Nintendo's corporate press material, little mention was made of Acclaim's sole N64 offering for 1996. Based on the Valiant comic series of the same name, Turok the Dinosaur Hunter goes through a wild 3-D first-person stroll through a mystical and fog-filled world full of very hungry nasties. The game features an intense antialiased environment along with a varied assortment of weapons, bloody explosions and other interesting special effects. Animations of 3-D polygonal enemies are equally as impressive as the sound effects and Peruvian soundtrack. Fans of Doom and Acclaim's Alien Trilogy will be very satisfied with the extra attention to detail, which includes animations of injured enemies spinning through the air before collapsing.



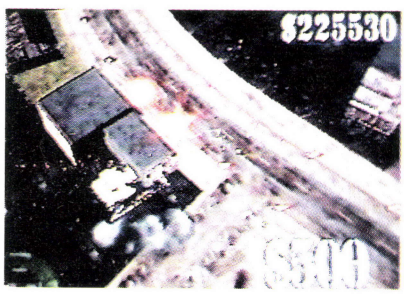
Wayne Gretzky Hockey

Based on the Wayne Gretzky and the NHLPA All-Stars arcade hockey games, Wayne Gretzky Hockey features large characters, user-controlled camera perspectives and fast-paced arcade-style action complete with the neat new motion-blurring puck tested in FOX's TV broadcast of this year's All-Star game. Four-player simultaneous action was exciting, and every goal was heralded by dramatic close-ups and beautiful red flashing goal lights. On the down side, the early version of WG Hockey demonstrated how N64 games could look just as chunky as PlayStation or Saturn 3-D titles if anti-aliasing and filtering effects were left turned off, and we really hope that the final version improves a bit on the video engine we saw in place.



Mortal Kombat Trilogy

In another gutsy move, Williams' Mortal Kombat Trilogy simultaneously demonstrates that Nintendo64 games need not be either 3-D or exclusive to be impressive to players. Giant arcade-sized characters and vividly colored backgrounds have been taken from each of the past Mortal Kombat games, bringing together more than 28 playable fighters and re-introducing characters such as Rayden and Baraka to their UMK3 brethren. Gameplay is still strictly two-dimensional and largely unchanged from the MK arcade machines, but the graphics look better than they have in any previous MK home translation. Hidden features? They're there in spades.



Blast Corps

Behind KI64, Rare's second Nintendo64 title is Blast Corps (formerly Blast Dozer), a simple premise made visually appealing with the N64's filtering and anti-aliasing technologies. As a nuclear reactor is about to experience a meltdown, heavy demolition vehicles in the Blast Corps are called in to lay waste to any structures standing between the meltdown prevention team and the reactor. Your goal is to cause thousands if not millions of dollars' worth of damage by taking such vehicles as bulldozers and ramming them at high speeds into property and real estate. Explosions were incredibly realistic, with flying debris trailing flames and smoke everywhere; and the visuals looked literally SGI-rendered quality. Will the final play mechanics be more involved? Hopefully and most likely.

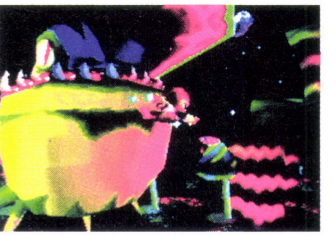
Other Nintendo Licensees and their Products

Angel Studios: Buggie Boogie, Ken Griffey Junior Baseball
BMG Entertainment: Silicon Valley
DMA Design: Body Harvest
Electronic Arts: FIFA Soccer 64
Gametek: Robotech: Crystal Dreams
GT Interactive: Ultra Combat
Interplay: Ultra Descent
Mindscape: Monster Dunk
Nintendo: Kirby's Air Ride (formerly Kirby Bowl), Legend of Zelda 64, StarFox 64, Super Mario Kart R
Rare: Goldeneye 007
Virgin Interactive: Freak Boy (formerly Stacker)
Williams: Doom 64, War Gods, NBA Hang Time, Robotron X



As always, Sega's booth was littered with elements from their flagship titles, which this year included Sonic X-Treme and Yuji Naka's incredible NiGHTS.





NiGHTS

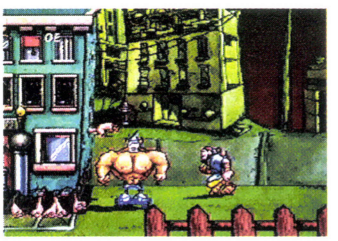
A $199 Saturn? And a $199 Modem?

Though Sonic the Hedgehog is still Sega's mascot, Yuji Naka's NiGHTS came to take center stage at Sega's booth for two reasons: Only the tiniest part of Sonic X-Treme was ready to show, and the new N64-competitive Sega 3-D Control Pad (complete with analog controller and pressure-sensitive L and R buttons) is being pushed for use in conjunction with the game. Having placed hands on NiGHTS, which many have compared with Mario 64 and Sony's Crash Bandicoot, it's clear that Naka's team has a unique and wonderful perspective on how to involve the player in fun three-dimensional experiences.

As mentioned in *Intelligent Gamer* and the last issue of *Intelligent Gamer's Fusion*, NiGHTS alternates between limited Mario 64-style 3-D walk-and-jump scenes, controlled 3-D ("linear on rails") flying scenes, and unrestricted 3-D flight scenes for boss encounters. The walk and jump portions take place when your character temporarily loses the ability to fly and lands on the ground to recoup flight power; the side-scrolling on-rails flight scenes constitute the bulk of the game action as you use the analog controller to move in X- and Y- axes (up, down, left and right) at will as the camera controls your Z-axis (depth) movement through 3-D worlds—the camera sometimes switches to overhead and alternating views; and the Boss encounters let you chase enemies in Panzer Dragoon-flight style. The general point is to collect stars, a goal which is accomplished by either touching the stars or hitting them from afar with circular blasts of magic by flying in circles.

Unlike Mario 64, NiGHTS makes no attempt to give secret meaning to every object in its worlds, nor does it allow completely free roaming through hundreds of square miles of distinctive in-game artwork. Instead, Naka's adventure begins by grabbing you with special effects and hurtling you through obstacles that may well prove initially confusing, teaching you to fly to complete objectives just as quickly as Mario teaches you to walk and run. The combined NiGHTS and 3-D Control Pad package is set to retail for $69.95—the same price as Nintendo's Super Mario 64 alone.

Sega walked into E³ with three numbers on its corporate mind: The Saturn carried a $249 suggested retail price which was ready to drop down to $199 should certain circumstances occur, and in any case, the company would be delivering an Internet-ready box which could browse the Web and use a PC keyboard—all for under $500. By the time the show had ended, Sega had responded to Sony's PlayStation price drop by matching the PS' MSRP at $199, and was in a position to deliver a Net box for just under $400 with software. Rebate coupons for those people who picked up Saturns during the two months of $249 pricing? Not planned. We can't wait to see how things heat up for the holidays.



Three Dirty Dwarves

Though we previewed it in *IG's FUSION* issue 10, SegaSoft's Three Dirty Dwarves was even better when we played it at E³. Conventional genre description would bear it out as a walk-and-fight title, but thanks to the unique premise of combining multiple gameplay elements on one CD, 3DD manages to remain unique throughout each level of play: You smash springy childrens' toy horses with baseball bats and shotgun butts to use the springs as pogos, fight against a "Pitbully" Boss in the midst of getting attacked by a horde of savage dogs, and ride a wrecking ball as it flattens a building in the distance. Three-player simultaneous play and support for Sega's NetLink peripheral are both added bonuses.

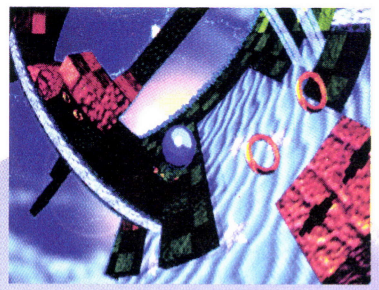


Just days prior to the start of the E³ show, Sega decided to give NiGHTS equal if not more floor space than their previous intended showstopper, Sonic X-Treme.



Sonic X-Treme

Sega's Genesis and Game Gear mascot has arrived on the Saturn with a speedy new graphics engine and several new visual twists. Only a single incomplete level (a future Boss stage) was playable on the show floor, with Sonic running around in a huge circular room filled with a couple of floating obstacles and a few sets of 3-D rings in floating helix shapes. The fast pace and smoothness of the engine, running at 60 FPS, were very noticeable, and video tapes displayed several other key features: Worlds based on older Sonic checkerboard designs completely rotate around as Sonic runs through the courses, and a special Reflex lens can distort your view of the worlds with a Fisheye lens (bulging at the center, pinched at the edges) perspective. Sega is internally projecting at this point that Sonic X-Treme will be a good, solid 3-D title for the Saturn, and they look to be correct.



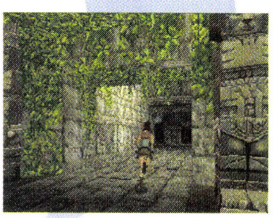
Sega's Sonic X-Treme was running at a speedy 60 FPS, although only one small level was playable at the show.





Bug Too!

Previewed in *Intelligent Gamer's Fusion* issue 10, Sega and Segasoft's Bug Too! was looking and playing much better than its predecessor. Sega's new SuperFly character was funky enough that the other playable bugs could have disappeared without concerning gamers, and the improved level maps were more vividly colored and creatively laid out than before. The same "feel" of Bug was there—good or bad, from your perspective—but the elements that would make your eyes bulge were more plentiful.





Tomb Raider

Easily among the most important and impressive action-adventure titles at the show. Whereas some were impressed by Capcom's Resident Evil, which used static backgrounds and polygon characters technologically proximal to the aging Alone in the Dark series, Tomb Raider blew us away with the same general premise modified with fully 3-D worlds and computer-controlled dynamic camera actions. Carrying twin guns which independently track on-screen enemies, the female lead character is animated with motions that instantly evoke memories of Indiana Jones. Fights with wild animals and dives into underwater caves are shown to the player in a moving camera manner as refined as that in Super Mario 64, and the action-packed gunplay will guarantee success with an older audience.



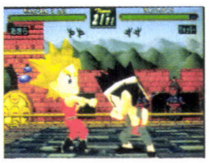
Heart of Darkness

One of the most influential games in the last few years was Delphine's Out of This World, which featured impressive rotoscoped animation and a compelling story line. Heart of Darkness, a game designed by many of the original Out of This World developers, follows strongly in the tradition of its predecessor, as it features an astounding amount of prerendered computer-generated animation.

As Andy, a young boy, you must journey into the land of nightmares to rescue your dog, Whiskey. The overall style of the game is extremely cinematic, with over 1.500 frames of animation used for the main character alone, and that for movement in one direction.

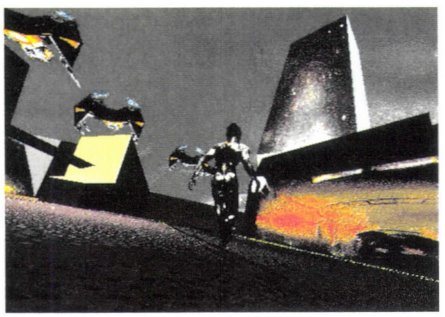
Wild Nine

Very early in development, Shiny Entertainment's Wild Nine is the clearest manifestation of company president David Perry's desire to develop portable characters—Shiny creative director Kevin Munroe introduced us to heroic lead teenager Wex and ever-so-slightly sexy Disney-esque female lead Boomer McTwist, both of whom look just as ready to appear in feature-length cartoon movies and action figure boxes as in a video game. After finding an arm ring of metallic armor and an oversized metal glove, Wex discovers that the motions of his hands can control different sorts of explosive discharges from a jewel embedded in the armor. An extremely early video tape focused on the movement of the Wex character in a 3-D level reminiscent of the first 2-D stage of Earthworm Jim. Promising to be a combination between Pandemonium (walking through linear/restricted 3-D worlds with 2-D controls) and R-Type (varying beam power-ups), Wild Nine is definitely worth waiting for.



VF Kids

Sega's Virtua Fighter Kids hasn't been confirmed yet for a North American release—the results of an in-show survey were to determine whether VFK or Sonic the Fighters would be brought over here—but as VFK is a straight port from the Titan hardware, Sega had nearly complete and fully playable demo discs already sitting in Saturns on the show floor alongside an arcade machine. The premise: All of the VF characters have been transformed into huge-headed childlike versions of themselves, and they get to fight in childrens' versions of their old backgrounds. All of their old moves are back with a few new ones, and you get to see Fighting Vipers-style triple replays of the most devastating attacks. For mainstream audiences? Maybe.



MDK (PC Version Shown; Saturn & PS Versions Forthcoming)

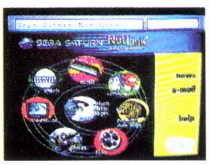
While licensing of characters is definitely a concern of Shiny's, MDK's content is most certainly not the standard fare that makes family entertainment companies get excited. Short for Murder Death Kill, MDK is Shiny's latest attempt to transcend other companies' technological efforts with a unique graphics engine, this time aimed squarely at the more mature PC gaming market.

You take control of a creature who looks to be alien from the luster of his skin and the sharp point at the tip of his head, but you discover that your character is a future human being wearing a metallic body suit and a powerful advanced rifle on his head. You move through the city—with stealth, as David Perry notes, so as to avoid detection—and hunt for a certain VIP as you move a pre-rendered character through a 3-D third-person world generated entirely with polygons. As you approach the tower where the VIP stands, overlooking the city from afar through a glass window, you change perspectives, using your head-mounted gun scope to draw a bead on the VIP's body or head. Blam! That's right; you're an assassin, and after the gun shot, the entire city's population wants you dead for taking out their mayor. Best of luck escaping—you might want to pull the gun off of your head and start firing at anything that moves.



Virtua Cop 2

Shown only at 10 percent completion, Sega's Virtua Cop 2 was the only AM2 arcade translation on the floor, but it was looking pretty hot. As a sequel to last year's first-person linear shooting title, VC2 improves on the lasting power by permitting the player a little more freedom to take multiple paths through the three main stages, improves the graphics and quickens the pacing of the action. One level was playable, complete with the improved trademark Virtua Cop zooming and rotating crosshairs, car chases and superior graphics.



NetLink

One of Sega's strongest products for 1996 is the Saturn NetLink, a $200 28.8k modem complete with World Wide Web browsing abilities and a generally smooth interface. With built in software anti-aliasing of fonts, the Web graphics are readable even on a television set, and if Sega can get the NetLink out in time for the holidays, the Saturn will be the first machine to deliver on the electronics industry's goal of producing an Internet box for under $500—moreover, thanks to the Saturn's new price tag, Sega's total package will sell for under $400.



Dark Savior

Climax Entertainment's latest title is reminiscent of their Genesis/Mega Drive hit LandStalker, and combines a user-controllable 3-D perspective with wonderfully laid out three-dimensional levels and puzzles. Unlike LandStalker, where jumping in a fixed isometric perspective was a great challenge, Dark Savior allows you considerably better freedom of control, multiple story lines, and great animation and music.

NO SHOWS

Most of Sega's Arcade Games

Where were Virtual On, Manx T.T. Super Bike and Fighting Vipers? Arcade machines only. Sega decided that none of the games were looking pristine enough to show on the floor, and thus decided not to show any of them. Fighting Vipers could have hypothetically been shown had not collision detection been entirely missing, and though the revision readied for E³ had floors, fences and characters all on screen, characters legs were submerged in the platforms and none of the other background graphics were in the game yet. (If you couldn't guess already that the final game will be completely fixed in all of those regards, smack yourself a little on our behalf.) Sega expressed internal concern that showing an unfinished version of any arcade translation would simply spark more "Shun's bridge complaints," a reference to the company's quickly recognized deletion of one of the more notable background objects in Virtua Fighter 2, their last big fighting game, and they're unlikely to want to live through such hounding questions again.

Daytona USA C.C. Edition

Neither shown nor discussed, Daytona USA Championship Circuit Edition was among the last-minute calls that turned out not ready to be put on the floor. Sega did, however, show unremarkable box art in their catalog and briefly mention some of the features already discussed in *Intelligent Gamer*.

Virtua Fighter 3

Announced for the Saturn before it has been played in arcades, Sega is banking heavily on the success of Virtua Fighter 3 in both formats for 1996 and 1997. As the arcade game's release date has slid closer to fall '96 and Sega internally projects that the game will be Saturn-ready by the 1997 holiday season, few public words have been said by the company on the game's progress save to note that the graphics and gameplay will be revolutionary. Duh. In a looping demo sequence actually running on Model 3 hardware and guarded constantly by large and decidedly cameraphobic security guards, VF3 showed off scenes that have all already been shown to the press, but seeing them in realtime was even more impressive than watching the game in still shots.

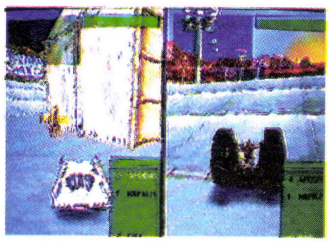
The Sacred Pools

You know you've got a hot product when people are as interested in the actresses you've hired for your game as they are in the technology that powers it, but SegaSoft intentionally held back on showing the design concepts behind what they've described as a "revolutionary and fun new way to do full-motion video games." Focusing on video imagery of some beautiful women and effects-laden footage, SegaSoft hosted a themed Sacred Pools party and even put up the cash for a live performance by the My Life With the Thrill Kill Kult. The only thing missing was a description of what the game would do that makes it so revolutionary.



PlayStation = $199

Sony's single most important announcement of the show was one that had been rumored to have been coming for months: The PlayStation's new suggested retail price tag, effective immediately, was a mere $200—an instant drop from the $300 suggested retail that had held fairly stable since the machine's introduction last September. Though Sony established itself at the show as the North American price leader, Sega had already dropped the Saturn's price in Japan to equivalent levels and was ready to respond immediately if necessary—and they did.



Twisted Metal 2: World Tour

It won *EGM*'s Game of the Year award for 1995 and brought thousands of people into the world of arena vehicle combat pioneered years ago by the classic pen-and-paper title Car Wars. Now, with improved graphics, new vehicles and a wild international theme, Twisted Metal returns for a World Tour. Immediately impressive were TM2's new vehicles and scenes—for example, you can ride through Paris and knock down the Eiffel Tower using a Herculean man who personally grasps and controls two giant wheels—and both Sony Interactive and Single Trac have pushed the old concepts to new levels by increasing your interactivity with the world and pushing the graphics engine to put more objects on screen than before.



Burning Road

Playmates surprised both Sony and E³ audiences by picking up the distribution rights to Burning Road, a first- and third-person racing game developed by Funsoft, as Sony had been fighting to release the game itself. Combining the fluid visual updating of Ridge Racer with the elemental snow and rain effects popularized in Turbo Out Run, Burning Road is both fast and extremely exciting. Because the version on display was incomplete, the gameplay lacked technique, but hopefully this will be tweaked before release.

The Black PlayStation

Produced for Japanese hobbyists looking to tinker with the PlayStation's powerful math chips, Sony debuted a sleek black $3000 development version of the PS which enables budding coders to use connected PCs to put their hands on the machine and try to push it in novel new directions. Such an endeavor might have given Atari's Jaguar the exact developing audience it needed had the company been so creative a couple of years ago, but only Sony has had the guts to try this officially.



Tekken 2

Reviewed fully in the first issue of *Intelligent Gamer*, Namco's Tekken 2 was the most impressive finished 3-D fighter at the show. Deep gameplay, fluid graphics, a great soundtrack and brand new rendered artwork were all highlights, and Namco intends to bring the game stateside by the first week of September. Though Sony was busy pushing Square's cartoony and innovative Tobal No. 1 and the games enthusiast press was already interested in seeing the conversion of Soul Edge, Tekken 2 is the 3-D fighter that gave the PlayStation the most weight at the show.



Formula One

Psygnosis' Formula One, previewed in issue 10 of *IG's FUSION*, is the company's closest racer to completion and a thoroughly impressive addition to Sony's '96 lineup.



Wipeout XL

Last year, Psygnosis knocked gamers backward with a product that was half artistic vision and half high-speed racing experience. At E³, their sequel went even further: WipeOut XL is faster, twice as impressive visually and has even more of the key elements which grabbed players' imaginations, including spreading triple missiles, an improved shockwave which literally ripples the track's very surface while tearing apart other vehicles, improved track graphics and tighter control. As you take control of your anti-gravity hovercraft, you'll immediately notice a trail of blue light subtly emanating from the engine—the light brightens and then trails brilliantly behind you and your opponents as you race around each course, adding color to the dark track surfaces and allowing you to quickly locate your closest competitors. A slightly modified artistic style presents icons and meters in new and creative ways, and even the options menus and "now loading" screens have sparks flying around to impress the viewer. One of Sony's best titles for 1996.



Jumping Flash! 2

Reviewed in this issue, JF2 takes another major step towards making VR gaming fun, this time by enhancing the character's jumping powers to ease control a bit.



Broken Helix

While Project Overkill has been Konami's main focus for the last few months, their internal development teams have been working on other games as well—our favorite was the futuristic 3-D action title Broken Helix. Despite the obvious similarities to Doom and Tenka, Broken Helix's fixed and detached third-person perspective looked unique and had lots of colorful rooms and scenes to explore. Even the weapon play and character-to-character interaction (blow up in-game characters with a few laser blasts) showed a lot of promise despite the fact that Konami's PR ace Randy Severin took pains to explain that the game was "really early." We only wish that we had seen it earlier!



Tobal No. 1

Previewed in the last issue of *Intelligent Gamer*, Square's Tobal No. 1 was among the third-party titles that Sony announced that they would be distributing in the United States. After several hands-on tests, *IG* found Tobal's controls to be a mite confusing but certainly unique—there's a separate jump button and the control pad can thus be rotated in a circle without causing you to leap up. Soul Edge- and Star Gladiator-style energy traces are left in the air as you execute attacks, and backgrounds have been confirmed as non-interactive.

Crash Bandicoot

It seems natural that Sony would want a somewhat Sonic-like mascot to push 1996 sales of their PlayStation hardware, and luckily for Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin of Naughty Dog software and the rest of David Siller's (of Aero the Acrobat and Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel fame) team at Universal Interactive, their little orange bandicoot (a "rat-like Australian marsupial") went from being a promising third-party 3-D romp to supreme star status on a huge Sony display. Hyped beyond belief, Crash combines simple run and jump 3-D play mechanics with Tazmanian Devil spin attacks and the collecting of apples and other items, primarily challenging the player to control Crash precisely and open up new territory in linear 3-D worlds which frequently have multiple paths. While the premise isn't as innovative as Mario 64, Sonic X-Treme or Nights, the audio-visual execution is impressive and the title character is thankfully hipper than Bubsy. A huge marketing campaign may stand a chance of giving Crash breakthrough appeal come the 1996 holiday season.





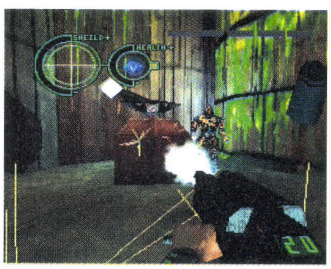
Spider

Previewed in the last issue of *Intelligent Gamer*, Boss Game Studios' 2-D/3-D action-platformer was wowing crowds with an even more impressive graphics engine than that which we saw last month. Gorgeous transparency effects in tunnels and fluidly rotating 3-D wells were very hot, and the traditional 2-D style gameplay (while still early) was very satisfying f or the gamers who find full 3-D exploration to be either tedious or confusing. With several similar titles on the way from other companies (namely Crystal Dynamics' Pandemonium and Scavenger's Tarantula), Boss' title had the smoothest and most colorful graphics and most potential for unique gameplay.



Monster Truck Rally

After creating both Destruction Derby and Wipeout, each of which has a unique twist on racing and smashing up other vehicles, Psygnosis has decided to appeal to more basic instincts by producing a game that solely focuses upon crushing cars. While only a limited amount was there to be played, Monster Truck Rally's general theme and presentation were impressive: You control a huge monster truck as camera angles change to show you smashing junked old cars in a dirt-filled stadium, with occasional lens flares to heighten the realism of the lighting. Both the trucks and stadium look terrific, though it's unclear at the moment whether you'll be doing more than just wrecking things for the sheer joy of it.



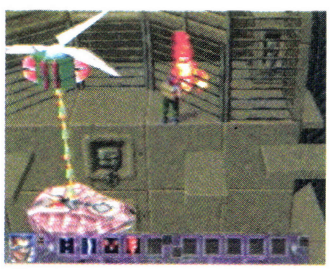
Tenka

In a sea of Doom clones, Psygnosis' Tenka had impressive gameplay and graphic effects which stood out from the rest. Walking through futuristic corridors and toting a huge laser-tracking rifle (complete with Predator-style red projecting beam), your character can walk normally, crouch and shuffle, jump, look up and down and traverse through levels which were designed to have realistic inclines and declines. Shading and movement are smooth throughout and the theme is dark and vaguely Japanese in a *Blade Runner* sort of way. Not revolutionary, but impressive nevertheless.



Destruction Derby 2

Psygnosis' take on American stock car racing and crashing is taken to new heights with an improved 3-D engine. Running only on wide screen TVs at the show and displaying a single ovular track complete with multiple cars, there wasn't a lot to see in Destruction Derby 2 save that the track designs will be much less confined than before, your car will be able to flip over on its roof, and the frame rate will be improved significantly.



Contra: Legacy of War

Somewhat surprising to many fans of the Contra series was Novotrade/Appalooza's 3-D PlayStation take on Contra games past and present, which had just enough slightly pixelized elements to make you wish that you were seeing the game on the smoother Nintendo^{64}. Though the gameplay wasn't bad, Contra: LoW felt little like its predecessors and far more like a Metal Gear game, with perspectives that seemed detached from the work done by Treasure and other Konami standbys in the past. Some of the in-game polygonal enemies were impressive, however, and the 3-D depth enabled the developers to place objects in cages under ground level and force your soldiers to run, jump and duck in three-fourths overhead or side-scrolling perspectives. If you're really interested in 3-D graphics, you can pop on a pair of red- and blue-lensed paper glasses to watch the game in a special 3-D mode... oh well.

NO SHOWS

Marvel Super Heroes

Shown only on video tape (and quite possibly as arcade footage), Capcom's most visually intense 2-D fighter to date was sadly not playable for the PS and Saturn, but it should be ready by the end of the year.

SFA 2

Mentioned in press materials and shown in arcade form (hey, the line forms here, buddy!), Capcom's best-playing 2-D fighter will also be available by the year's end for the Saturn and PS.

Soul Edge

Shown only on video tape and in numerous arcade machines around the Namco pavilion, Soul Edge should be another impressive title for Namco's late '96 or early '97 lineup. The best feature? Namco intends to improve upon their arcade conversion of Soul Edge Version B, which will appear in arcades without much fanfare and add several new characters, backgrounds and features. The final home version of Soul Edge will be as much of an improvement over Soul Edge Version A as Tekken 2's home translation was.

Castlevania: The Bloodletting

Where, oh where, was Konami's new Castlevania game? In Japan and nowhere to be found on the show floor. Alas, poor Belmont, we knew ye well.

Speed King

The only title which could conceivably knock Wipeout XL for a loop is Konami's high-end futuristic Japanese arcade hovercraft racer Speed King (mentioned in *IG's FUSION* issue ten), which was shown only as arcade-based video tape at their booth.

EA Sports

Other than Triple Play 97, none of the major EA Sports Fall releases (particularly Madden NFL 97 and NHL 97) were being shown on the show floor. However, IG's resident sports nut Kraig Kujawa went behind closed doors to preview both titles and came away considerably impressed. Also noticably absent from the floor, obviously for competitive reasons, was Sony's NFL GameDay '97.



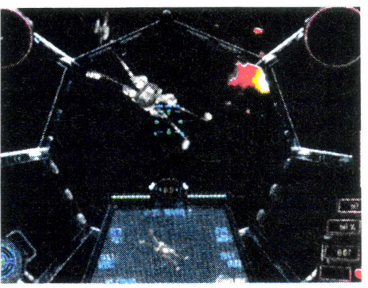
U.S. Gold's Tomb Raider utilizes 3-Dfx technology to create a truly stimulating experience..

In the last year, one of the biggest questions on the minds of developers and high-end PC gamers was which 3-D accelerator card would be the one to emerge as a gaming standard. After viewing several impressive games and chatting with game developers at E³, it appears that 3DFX Interactive's Voodoo chipset is the front-runner.

Currently, Orchid has licensed the chipset and plans to make it available for home use in the mid- to late-summer of 1996. The board is powerful enough to be used in arcade games, and many developers are even murmuring that the chipset's performance slightly edges out the highly touted Nintendo[64] console platform.

Support for the 3DFX was quite obvious from the diversity of software shown on the show floor. Games included Eidos's Tomb Raider, Interplay's VR Soccer '96, Microsoft's Monster Truck Madness and HellBender, Ocean's Dreadnought and HMS Carnage, Psygnosis's Wipeout XL and Virgin's Grandslam Baseball. Tomb Raider and HMS Carnage were particularly impressive, with each manipulating large polygon counts with numerous 3-D effects and backgrounds.

LucasArts

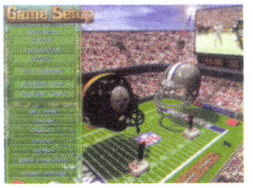


One of the most impressive games for the PC was undoubtedly Lucas Arts' Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight. This sequel to the popular 3-D, first-person shooter was simply breath-taking—quite possibly the best "Doom-esque" game of the show, if not the best PC game at the show altogether. The version that was being displayed on the show floor was being powered by a 3DFX accelerator board which boosted the game's frame rate, while using MIP-Mapping to prevent any sort of pixelization when objects came close to the screen. Lavish cut-scenes and huge, immersive 3-D environments were the stars of the Windows 95 compatible title.

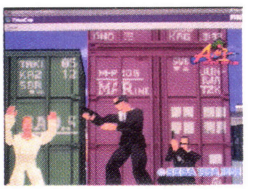
Also noteworthy at Lucas Arts' booth was X-Wing Vs. Tie Fighter, which excels at complex multiplayer combat while presenting an entirely new batch of fully-textured 3-D rendered graphics. X-Wing vs. Tie Fighter was Windows 95 native and slated for a late '96 release.



PC sports have generally excelled in the strategy and options categories, but have fallen short when it came to arcade-style gameplay. This may change, however, with the release of EA Sports' Windows 95 native Madden NFL 97 football title and NHL 97 hockey game. Madden is a well-rounded sports simulation which also emphasizes the type of action-oriented gameplay you might find on a console system. The big surprise is that the fast-paced visuals definitely rival many of the 32-Bit console football titles, sporting crisp graphics and excellent gameplay. Madden will feature extra options such as a customizable playbook and a "Madden University," the latter of which is a sports encyclopedia of sorts.

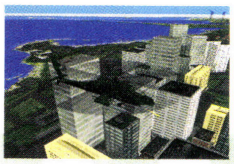


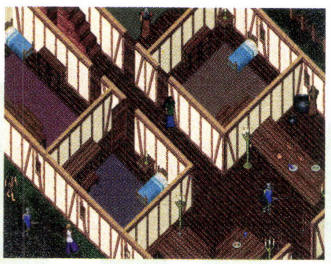
Sega Entertainment's full launch into the PC market should make action gamers happy—especially those who want a taste of arcade-quality action on their PC systems. Virtua City P.D. was one of the most impressive offerings, providing an excellent conversion of the Virtua Cop arcade game renamed for a PC market where the name Virtual Cop was already taken. At E³, a mouse provided the means to aim the cross-hairs since SEGA had not decided on whether or not to produce a PC light gun at press time.

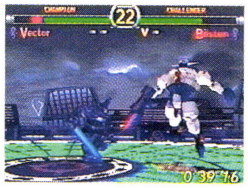


Origin

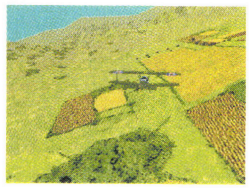
At **Origin,** Privateer: the Darkening was wowing viewers with its fast, fluid gameplay and stunning graphics. The interface was nothing short of fantastic: Using a new engine developed from scratch, Privateer II can handle large numbers of highly detailed ships (including light-sourcing) on-screen while moving them at a rapid frame rate. Producer Erin Roberts said that the engine still has to go through some fine-tuning and could be as much as four times as fast as was Wing Commander IV's. Longbow was also showing, and looked good as reported previously in an *IG* preview. Multima (Ultima Online, previewed in *IG's Fusion* issue 10) was also running with a large demonstration linking thousands of players across the Internet.







At the **Blizzard** booth (considerably larger this year than last due largely to the mega-hit Warcraft II), two new games were on display. Starcraft made its debut—it's essentially Warcraft II with a space-age theme at this early stage. Hopefully, the program will assume more of its own identity by release, but how bad could it be to have another game much like and just as good as Warcraft II? Blizzard is also in the process of creating BattleNet, a free multiplayer service available to people that purchase their products in the future. Also showing was the anticipated Diablo, a multi-player "dungeon crawl" RPG which looked excellent and should be out by the time you read this. Unfortunately, Pax Imperia 2 was nowhere to be seen, leading to speculation that it may not be released this year.



Sierra had a private room to display its new titles. Red Baron II was looking hot and should live up to the exquisite reputation of its predecessor. Also on display was the detailed (though not obsessively so) Robert E. Lee: Civil War General. This hex-grid title should appeal to the avid war simulation and Civil War fan. Mission Force Cyberstorm, a strategic hex-grid Earthsiege game, was showing off some nice graphics and playability. An early trailer for Phantasmagoria II was on display, showing that the new product should be much better and darker than the first. Designed by Lorelei Shannon, this title is for older gamers only. Science fiction legend Arthur C. Clarke's Rama series is also being made into an adventure game that looks promising.

Westwood Studios



Nemesis

Westwood Studios put on a good show with their Command & Conquer sequel, Red Alert (previewed in this issue) and Lands of Lore II, which continues to become more and more impressive. The Windows 95 version of Command & Conquer was shown, featuring sharp, high-resolution graphics, and TCP/IP multiplayer connections.

Small tidbits of **Westwood's** most exciting new project, Blade Runner, were also shown. The game will place you in vast 3-D worlds, though Westwood only showed a handful of beautifully rendered video that looked very cinematic in quality. From what was shown, Westwood appears to have the atmosphere of the movie intact, something that fans will appreciate.

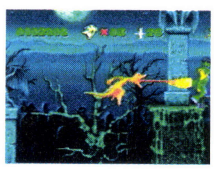
Interplay, which now owns a majority of the TSR licenses, is aiming to stake a major claim of the RPG market. With Descent into Undermountain and the new GURPS title, along with the D&D strategy game Blood and Magic, they have some strong titles coming out. Also very impressive was Interplay's upcoming Starfleet Academy, a title which was both gorgeous and detailed. The game is basically a Star Trek flight simulator of sorts that features the voice talents of most of the original Trek crew.

Sir-Tech was displaying Nemesis: A Wizardry Adventure, which continued to make us happy. A combination adventure/action RPG, Nemesis uses some impressive animation techniques and should show up by early next year. Shadows Over Riva, the third in the detailed Realms of Arkania series, should be out by this fall and has several playability and graphic enhancements. Deadly Games, the new, network version of Jagged Alliance, will also include an entirely new solo-play game.

EA and Bullfrog had a surprisingly small PC lineup at E³. One of the booth's biggest standouts was Bullfrog's Dungeon Keeper, with impressive graphics and the company's unique, multi-player dungeon master and heroes setup. The title, which should be out as you read this, promises hours of fun for RPG fans. Conspicuously absent were The Indestructibles and Theme Hospital.



Microsoft was also on hand with a huge booth showing their dedication to Windows 95 as a viable game platform. The aforementioned Monster Truck Madness places gamers in the center of multiplayer, 3-D vehicle-wrecking carnage, while GEX provides Windows 95 users with an above-average platform game that looks identical to its older console counterparts. Also shown were NBA Full Court Press and Close Combat, the former an impressive 3-D polygonal basketball title and the latter a game that attempts to simulate the psychological issues of combat in addition to the strategic.



Accolade's multiplayer planetary conquest strategy game, Deadlock, looked promising at its alpha stage. With plenty of unit types, decent graphics, a liberal touch of humor, and an easy Windows 95 interface, this game should be really enjoyable. Also showing was Eradicator, a 3-D corridor shooter that included a few novel twists: It can be played from several perspectives, including third-person and "over-the-shoulder." Though somewhat innovative, the title blatantly borrows many things from other action games and will have a tough time competing with games like Duke Nukem 3D and Quake.



Mindscape and SSI

Mindscape and SSI were displaying several new titles, including SSI's Star General, Steel Panthers II and the multiplayer War Wind. The most interesting of the three was War Wind, a multiplayer action-strategy game along the lines of Warcraft II and Command & Conquer with medieval themes. The game was quite entertaining, but unfortunately won't be out until 1997. Star General follows up on the strong-selling General series with a space theme (and there are rumors the next game in the series will be set in the World War II Pacific theater). Mindscape debuted Star Trader, which expands on the "build a stellar trading empire" theme with tons of detail and depth. This title should be one to look for around the Christmas season. Warhammer 40K, which should be out by the time you read this, looked good and had some interesting AI features, including the ability to split your team and have one member scout out and map rooms for you. Fans of Space Hulk should enjoy this game, though it doesn't have the frightening tension that made Space Hulk so fun to play. Mindscape's NCAA Basketball, though early in development, looked promising. Viacom and Simon-Schuster were previewing a hot sub game under development, named Tom Clancy SSN after the best-selling author. Viacom was also showing Joe's Apartment, an interesting game departure which places you in the role of having to manage a colony of roaches with the goal of infesting Joe's Apartment. It's based on the upcoming movie.



Warhammer

Microprose, which recently became the official name of both Spectrum Holybyte and Microprose, was showing a very early version of Falcon 4.0. The graphics were incredible, but be prepared to beef up your system if you want to run this power-hungry fighter simulation: A Pentium 166, 16 MB RAM and a 3DFX graphics card are essential to playing this at an acceptable frame rate. European Air War should impress the World War II simulation fans, although you'll have to wait until early 1997. Magic the Gathering also looked sharp, with Microprose expressing confidence that this title will be released in July. Star Trek: Generations looks to be a 3-D action game with minor puzzle elements coupled with vast doses of movie footage, and new 3-D rendered full-motion video sequences. Most of the movie's actors will lend their voice to this title. Don't worry too much about duplication of the film's plot, however, because Generations deviates from it quite a bit.



European Air War

Bethesda's Daggerfall continued to draw attention from RPG fans. With tons of depth and detail, this game should consume time at a voracious rate. Though it admittedly needed a high-res graphical update, the title looked solid, and Bethesda made assurances that it would have no problems making store shelves in August.

New World Computing was showing Heroes of Might and Magic II, which looked strong, and even had some screens from the highly-awaited Might and Magic VI, which won't be available until next year. The pictures were graphically impressive, and the game should be one to keep an eye on.



M2

As for the software news: What powers most of 3DO's best M2 games at the moment? You might hear it called by the name "Mercury," but the actual name is MCRE, an anagram for Mark Cerney's Rendering Engine. Formerly a member of Universal Interactive's Seven team, the development group responsible for Disruptor (a title tipped by many insiders to be both the 3DO Opera and M2's superior answer to Doom), Cerney came to 3DO months ago and worked with (help from) Studio 3DO employees on a special M2 engine for Seven's game.

What eventually became MCRE was initially designed as an application-specific engine that would handle Doom-style 3-D graphics, but at some point talks between Universal and 3DO broke off for rights to Disruptor—rumor has it that $1 million would have purchased the rights to both Opera and M2 versions of the game, and 3DO wasn't interested in spending that much for one title. According to the legend, Cerney left the Disruptor project, which led to stories that Seven had broken up, and Universal instead decided to release the game for Sony's PlayStation.

The MCRE engine, which was already impressively fast and making it extremely easy for developers to plug in extra graphics and audio code, was then heavily modified by 3DO coders, replacing approximately 75-80 percent of the original data with more optimized and general-purpose routines. MCRE was apparently used in 3DO's M2 developers' demonstration video (see *IGF* issue nine), and is now at the core of many of Studio 3DO's up and coming titles.

NO SHOWS

M2: Quietly allowing their competitors to bask in the spotlight, Matsushita's M2 scored some style points simply for offering disillusioned developers and publishers a powerful CD-based alternative to the cartridge-based Nintendo 64.

SNK's second home system: While SNK had only a limited presence at the show —Sony ports of its Samurai Shodown 3 and KoF '95 games were on display—a company representative confirmed that the company has been redesigning the specifications for its 64-Bit arcade and home units. With four games under development (a shooter, a fighter, a 3-D simulation and an unknown project), SNK's plan appears to be to have the raw SGI-based polygonal models in place for whenever their chip development ends—the company is said to intend to release a machine with powers in between the Matsushita M2 and Sega Model 3 arcade hardware, landing roughly at the 750,000 polygons-per-second mark with filtering, MIP-mapping and other advanced graphics features.

OLYMPIC SOCCER

The crowd roars as

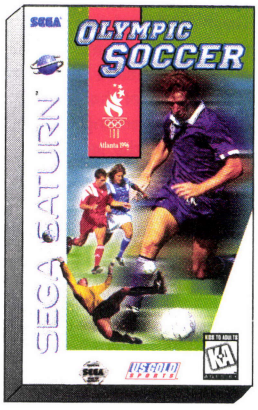


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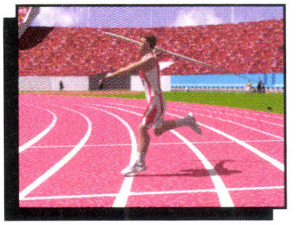


AGE OLD

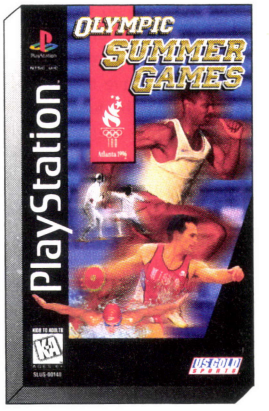
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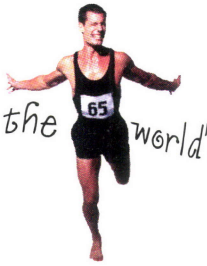
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JAPAN TODAY

IG's Definitive Guide to Japanese Bargain Hunting—

AKIHABARA: The Electric Town

Akihabara. Remember the name; it's a place in Tokyo where you can find anything and everything that uses electricity, including all of the air conditioners, TVs and stereos you would ever want to own. Akihabara also happens to be the home of an intensely concentrated set of new and used video game stores, which have a reputation for being the first places to make any major product available within the Japanese islands. If you can't find what you are looking for in Akihabara, it is either so old that it no longer exists or it is still yet to be developed. One other possibility: What you're looking for may be hidden on a high shelf within a small store on a small obscure side street. The most alluring thing about the neighborhood is its reputation for having the most competitive prices in Tokyo, and though there are great bargains to be had if you know your way around, they're often not as much as people would expect.



▲ Akihabara is truly amazing, especially to the Western tourist. The streets are always busy, and stores peddle their electronic wares on tables out on the sidewalk.

As you get off of the train at Akihabara station, your eyes quickly come across ads for all sorts of electronic equipment and station signs pointing toward the entrance to "Akihabara, the Electric Town." Following the sign's arrows down a flight of stairs to the station exit, you get stuck in a sea of people already rushing home with their new electronic toys. There are also more than a few people carting home entire computer systems.

Walking out of the station, you realize that you are in a new atmosphere radically unlike

In Akihabara, everything is being sold—and sold loudly.

the other crowded but tidy, sedate and polite streets of Tokyo: In Akihabara, everything is being sold and sold loudly. There are many people handing out leaflets advertising the latest deals on electronic gear, and all of the stores have sidewalk displays that cover their entire store fronts. Depending on the store or store chain, there will be many different types of products on display, including newly popularized cellular phones. Over the past few years, it had become standard practice for female high school students to have pagers, but now the trend is shifting toward carrying portable phones—they're as cheap to use as Japanese public phones (about a dime every two minutes for local calls). Portable phones may not have crystal-clear audio yet, but they've made great improvements in range in the past year.

THE ARCADE SCENE

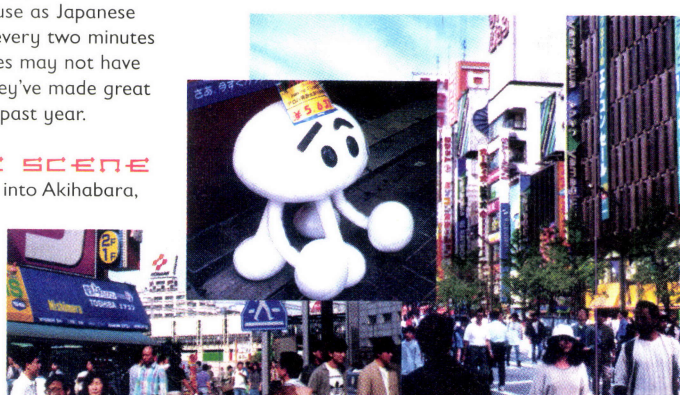
Before you wander too far into Akihabara, you will encounter a big arcade owned by Sega, which is almost constantly packed with hard-core gaming fans who want the latest games to play. One game that had a large gallery full of observers was Sega's combination of first-person shooting with an in-the-helicopter theme, Gunblade N.Y.: When you first start to watch the action, you might think that the game is entirely linear, but it is possible for the player to key in on a certain enemy and have the helicopter rotate and turn in that direction. If the helicopter is making a pass and you miss destroying an enemy, the helicopter will turn and make another pass so you can clean up what you started. With this feature built in, a Time Attack Mode actually makes sense—a better player will be able to clear the game sooner than a newbie.

Downstairs in this arcade is where the real action was: This is where all of the really hard-core players show up to test their skills against other people. As the arcade is one of Sega's, the dominant game for the crowds was still Virtua Fighter 2.1; there were also a fair number of people clustered around both Tekken 2 and Virtual On trying to find out who was the best.

CONSOLE GAMING

While wandering down the main drag of Akihabara, you quickly realize that several large retail companies dominate the area, including Laox, Softmap and Sato Musen. Interestingly, these companies can have multiple stores within the confines of Akihabara which are completely dedicated to an individual type of product—one store would carry only home appliances, another computer, and another games. It is quite possible to see one company having as many as six different buildings with electronic equipment on display within a 10-minute walking radius. In between and in some of the many side streets, you will see more of the smaller operation stores that deal in specific electronic parts, or Mom-and-Pop stores that have an odd jumble of electronic products on display. At stores like this, it is not uncommon to see a Mini-Disc Walkman on display beside a vacuum cleaner.

In one area, there is a high concentration of stores that deal in video games. Along a two-block spread on both sides of the street, you can find over 10 video game stores—a gamer's paradise, especially considering that in one



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instance, there were three different dedicated video game stores in a row. (In any other area of Japan, you would obviously expect to have some space between stores, or at least a store that sold a different type of product—in the U.S., people are lucky to find two game stores in a mall!) All of the stores carry Super Famicom (SNES), Saturn and PlayStation titles, and many stores also stocked the Neo•Geo and the Neo•Geo CD systems, with Art of Fighting Gaiden already on sale—it's surprising when you consider that the game has not been in the arcades for very long.

Some stores do have foreign game sections, but few games are generally on display—you might find about six or seven titles for the SNES and Genesis, and usually, a hockey game is one of the titles. There aren't any titles for the the U.S. PlayStation, which is surprising but possibly connected with Sony's tight squeeze on Japanese retailers, but there are titles for the the U.S. Saturn. The biggest surprise, or perhaps not a surprise at all to loyal Atari-ites, is that Jaguars some times are displayed in the same sections, sitting on the shelves collecting dust with a few Jaguar games beside them.

Other hardware relegated to dark store corners are the 3DO and the PC/FX. While both of these still have a few titles coming out, their corners are mostly undisturbed by the presence of people. It's a sad fate for games that appear on hardware that do not spark the interest of the public. Many of the game stores in Akihabara are small, single-floor operations that have a section for each type of hardware, as real estate is notoriously expensive in the crammed streets of Tokyo. Larger stores often have entire buildings filled with games, with each floor devoted to one specific machine and the minor hardware scattered among these various floors. For example, in a Laox store, the first floor was devoted to books on video games: strategy books, magazines and fan books. The second floor was devoted to the PlayStation with a PC/FX section thrown in. The next floor had Saturn games on display with a small 3DO section. SF games filled the fourth floor with Neo•Geo games. On the next two floors after that was a computer games section for Windows, PC98s and the Mac. If nothing else, Akihabara's long-time profitability on game hardware and software shows that games are a lasting valuable commodity—people here devote entire buildings to video games alone.



▲ At Sega's arcade in Akihabara, one of the more popular games was Gunblade N.Y., which puts the player in the role of a side gunner on a helicopter gunship.

What has changed about Akihabara is the number of places that have computers for sale. Just a few years ago, there was not much of a market for computers, but with the discovery of the Internet, Japanese people have started to buy more computer hardware and software. Japanese companies tend to market products that are broken down to their barest component parts, such that instead of making a computer, the companies will make a specific word processor or game hardware. By these means, there are more products to sell and the public does not have to deal with the complexities of a computer's operating system.

As a result, there are very few computers in Japanese households, and a computer game is a major hit if it can sell 100,000 units, while a console game is considered average or even poor if only 100,000 units sell. At this time, the home computer market is still untapped and has a large potential for growth.

With all of the competition, you would expect to find some great deals on video games.

PRICING

With all of the competition, you would expect to find some great deals on video games. However, this is not so much the case today as it was a few years ago. When you look into the stores, a price that you often see for PS titles is 5632 yen ($56). At first, you may think this is actually cheaper than you would normally get at stores not in the Akihabara area. Wrong. When you pay for the game, you get charged another 3 percent for tax, bringing the price back up to 5800 yen ($58), which is no different from the going rate.

I did not find a single game for the PS that was cheaper than you could normally find elsewhere, and the same could be said about Saturn titles. It was almost as if there was an unwritten rule to not undercut the competition and start a price war on CD-based 32-bit video games. For tourists, Akihabara is a must-see "games central," but for the average citizen, it's probably better to find a game store that is in the neighborhood rather than going out of the way and trying to find the best deal for minimal gain. One advantage that Akihabara does offer is something that Japanese people refer to as "flying," which is when a store will sell a game a day before the release date—it's great if you want to be the first kid on the block to play a new hot title. This does not happen at all the stores in Akihabara, but at some of the smaller specialty shops, it is a possibility.

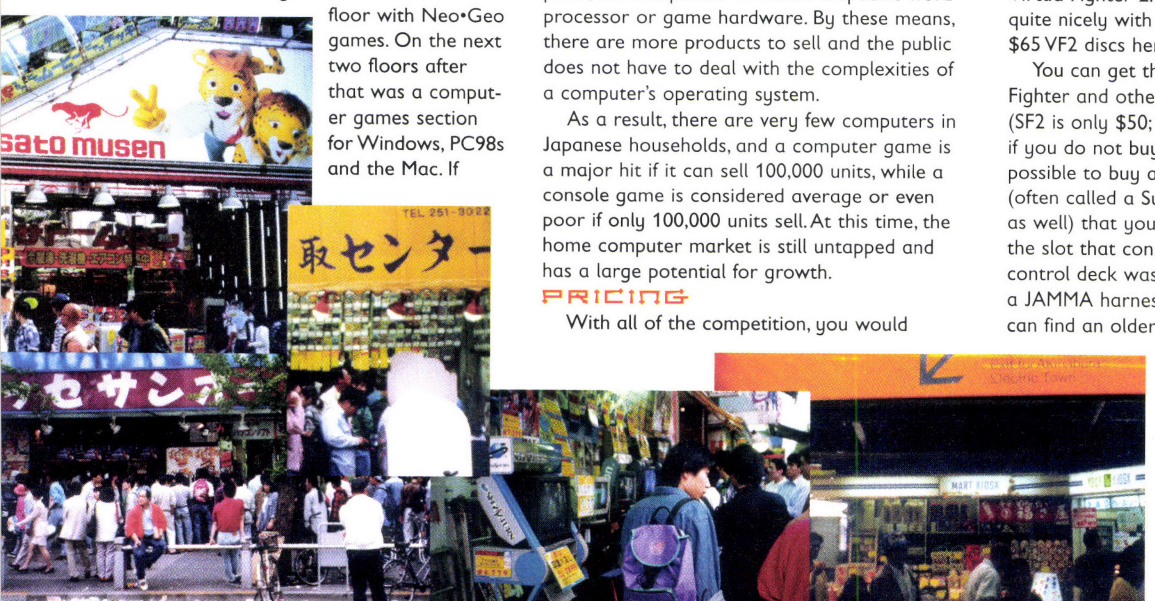


ARCADE BOARDS

One special type of store in Akihabara that you will not find normally in other districts deals exclusively or almost exclusively with arcade equipment. At these stores, you can find classic arcade boards and order brand-new arcade games as well: If you shell out 700,000 yen ($7,000), it is possible to buy an entire Virtua Fighter 2.1 package, which contrasts quite nicely with the $200 Saturn and under $65 VF2 discs here.

You can get the arcade versions of Virtua Fighter and other games for much lower prices (SF2 is only $50; SF Zero 2 is $1,800), especially if you do not buy the entire cabinet as well. It is possible to buy an arcade board controller (often called a Super Gun, available in the States as well) that you can plug into your TV, since the slot that connects arcade boards to the control deck was standardized in a form called a JAMMA harness. In some rare instances, you can find an older arcade game that is cheaper than the version that was ported over for a console. However, arcade boards tend to be more fragile and definitely take up more space than a cartridge or CD.

-Akira Kishimoto



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pc-windows

RECENT RELEASES

Afterlife [LucasArts]
Golden Nugget [Virgin]
NHL PowerPlay '96 [Virgin]
Space Hulk: Vengeance of the Blood Angels [Electronic Arts]

JULY 1996

Close Combat [Microsoft]
Diablo [Blizzard]
Dungeon Keeper [Electronic Arts]
Fire Fight [Electronic Arts]
Hind [Interactive Magic]
S.T.O.R.M. [American Softworks]
Triple Play 97 [Electronic Arts]

AUGUST 1996

Circle of Blood [Virgin]
Grand Slam '96 [Virgin]
HyperBlade [Activision]
Riana Rouge [Konami]
Sim City 2000 Network Edition [Maxis]
Z [Virgin]

SEPTEMBER 1996

Enemy Nations [Viacom New Media]
SimCopter [Maxis]

OCTOBER 1996

Command & Conquer: Red Alert [Virgin]
Deadly Tide [Microsoft]
Destruction Derby 2 [Psygnosis]
Grid Runner [Virgin]
Heart of Darkness [Virgin]
Hellbender [Microsoft]
Interstate '76 [Activision]
Monster Truck Madness [Microsoft]
NBA Full Court Press [Microsoft]
Scorched Planet [Virgin]

4TH QUARTER 1996

Athanor [Psygnosis]
Armored Fist 2 [NovaLogic]
Blast Chamber [Activision]
Comanche 3 [NovaLogic]
Discworld II: Missing Presumed...!? [Psygnosis]
F-22 Lightning II [NovaLogic]
FIFA Soccer 97 [Electronic Arts]
Galactic Mirage [Virgin]
Gex [Microsoft]
Island of Dr. Moreau [Psygnosis]
Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II [LucasArts]
Joe's Apartment [Viacom New Media]
Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny [Virgin]
Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
Leisure Suit Larry: Yank Hers Away! [Sierra]
Madden NFL 97 [Electronic Arts]
Microsoft Flight Simulator for Windows 95 [Microsoft]
Microsoft Golf 3.0 [Microsoft]
Microsoft Soccer [Microsoft]
MTV's Aeon Flux [Viacom New Media]
MTV's Slamscape [Viacom New Media]
NBA Live 97 [Electronic Arts]
NHL 97 [Electronic Arts]
Outlaws [LucasArts]
Perfect Weapon [American Softworks]
Phantasmagoria 2: A Puzzle of Flesh [Sierra]
Screamer 2 [Virgin]
Snow Crash [Viacom New Media]
Surreal [American Softworks]
The City of Lost Children [Psygnosis]
The Condemned [Microsoft]
The Divide: Enemies Within [Viacom New Media]
TNN Motor Sports Hardcore 4x4 [American Softworks]
TNN Outdoors Bass Tournament '97 [American Softworks]
Tomb Raider [Eidos Interactive]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Age of Empires [Microsoft]
Pitfall 3-D [Activision]
Star Trek: Voyager [Viacom New Media]
The 7th Guest: Part III [Trilobyte]
X-Wing Vs. TIE Fighter [LucasArts]



consoles

RECENT RELEASES

F1 Challenge [Virgin]
Golden Nugget [Virgin]
GunGriffon [Sega of America]
NBA Action [Sega of America]
NHL PowerPlay '96 [Virgin]
Shining Wisdom [Working Designs]
Skeleton Warriors [Playmates]
Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 [Williams]

JULY 1996

Baku Baku [Sega of America]
Buster Bros. Collection [Capcom]
Destruction Derby [Sega of America]
Golden Axe: The Duel [Sega of America]
Road Rash [Electronic Arts]
Shockwave Assault [Electronic Arts]
The Legend of Oasis [Sega of America]
Topps MVP Baseball '96 [Data East]
VR Baseball '96 [Interplay]
World Series Baseball II [Sega of America]

AUGUST 1996

3-D Baseball [Crystal Dynamics]
Darknet [American Softworks]
Die Hard Trilogy [Fox Interactive]
Dragon Force [Working Designs]
Grand Slam '96 [Virgin]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
Major Damage [Capcom]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
Powerslave [Playmates]
Robo Pit [T*HQ]
The Need For Speed [Electronic Arts]
TNN Motor Sports Hardcore 4x4 [American Softworks]

SEPTEMBER 1996

Command & Conquer [Virgin]
Dead or Alive [Tecmo]
FIFA Soccer 97 [Electronic Arts]
Fox Hunt [Capcom]
Lethal Enforcers 1&2 [Konami]
Madden NFL 97 [Electronic Arts]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
NHL 97 [Electronic Arts]
PGA Tour 97 [Electronic Arts]
Rayman 2 [Ubi Soft]
S.T.O.R.M. [American Softworks]
Tecmo Stackers [Tecmo]
Tecmo Super Bowl [Tecmo]
Werewolf: The Apocalypse [Capcom]

OCTOBER 1996

Blast Chamber [Activision]
Grid Runner [Virgin]
Heart of Darkness [Virgin]
Herc's Adventures [LucasArts]
Magic Knight Rayearth [Working Designs]

4TH QUARTER 1996

Area 51 [Williams]
Armed [Interplay]
Battlestations [Electronic Arts]
Broken Helix [Konami]
Bubsy 3D [Accolade]
Bug Too! [Sega of America]
Contra: Legacy of War [Konami]
Crypt Killer [Konami]
Daytona USA: Championship Circuit Edition [Sega of America]
Deathdrome [Viacom New Media]
Descent [Interplay]
Fighting Vipers [Sega of America]
Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
Loaded [Interplay]
Manx TT: Super Bike [Sega of America]
Mega Man 8 [Capcom]
Mega Man X4 [Capcom]
MLBPA Bottom of the 9th [Konami]
mr. Bones [Sega of America]
NFL '97 [Sega of America]
NFL Full Contact [Konami]
Nights (Into Dreams...) [Sega of America]
Policenauts [Konami]
Project Overkill [Konami]
Shredfest [Electronic Arts]
Sonic X-Treme [Sega of America]
Soviet Strike [Electronic Arts]
Spot Goes to Hollywood [Virgin]
Street Fighter Alpha 2 [Capcom]
The Lost Vikings 2 [Interplay]
The Sacred Pools [Sega of America]
Three Dirty Dwarves [Sega of America]
Tomb Raider [Eidos Interactive]
Virtua Cop 2 [Sega of America]
Virtual On: Cyber Troopers [Sega of America]
VR Basketball '96 [Interplay]
VR Football '96 [Interplay]
Worldwide Soccer II [Sega of America]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Castlevania: The Bloodletting [Konami]
Criticom 2 [Vic Tokai]
DOOM [GT Interactive]
Firo & Klawd [BMG Interactive]
Grand Theft Auto [BMG Interactive]
Hard Boiled [GTE]
Hexen [GT Interactive]
Kumite: The Fighter's Edge [Konami]
LUNAR: Director's Cut [Working Designs]
Pitfall 3-D [Activision]
Revelations: Devil Summoner [Atlus]
Tempest 2000 [Interplay]
Tetris Plus [Jaleco]
TNN Outdoors Bass Tournament '97 [American Softworks]

* - *Working Title*

new releases



RECENT RELEASES

DarkStalkers: The Night Warriors [Capcom]
Golden Nugget [Virgin]
MLB Pennant Race [Sony CE]
NHL PowerPlay '96 [Virgin]
Triple Play 97 [Electronic Arts]

JULY 1996

adidas Power Soccer [Psygnosis]
Aquanaut's Holiday [Sony CE]
Beyond the Beyond [Sony CE]
Bogey: Dead 6 [Sony CE]
Buster Bros. Collection [Capcom]
Carnage Heart [Sony CE]
Chronicles of the Sword [Psygnosis]
Formula 1 [Psygnosis]
International Track & Field [Konami]
Legacy of Kain [Crystal Dynamics]
The Final Round [Konami]
Topps MVP Baseball '96 [Data East]

AUGUST 1996

3-D Baseball [Crystal Dynamics]
Darknet [American Softworks]
Die Hard Trilogy [Fox Interactive]
Grand Slam '96 [Virgin]
Jumping Flash! 2 [Sony CE]
Major Damage [Capcom]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
Myst [Psygnosis]
Powerslave [Playmates]
Project: Horned Owl [Sony CE]
Robo Pit [T*HQ]
TheAdventures of Lomax in Lemmingland [Psygnosis]*
Time Commando [Activision]
TNN Motor Sports Hardcore 4x4 [American Softworks]

SEPTEMBER 1996

FIFA Soccer 97 [Electronic Arts]
Final DOOM [Williams]
Fox Hunt [Capcom]
Lethal Enforcers 1&2 [Konami]
Mortal Kombat Trilogy [Williams]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
Namco Museum Vol. 1 [Namco]
Ridge Racer Revolution [Namco]
Shredfest [Electronic Arts]
Soviet Strike [Electronic Arts]
Syndicate Wars [Electronic Arts]
Tecmo Stackers [Tecmo]
Tecmo Super Bowl [Tecmo]
Tecmo World Golf [Tecmo]
Tekken 2 [Namco]
Werewolf: The Apocalypse [Capcom]

OCTOBER 1996

BallBlazer [LucasArts]
Black Dawn [Virgin]
Blast Chamber [Activision]
Destruction Derby 2 [Psygnosis]
Grid Runner [Virgin]
Herc's Adventures [LucasArts]
NBA Hang Time [Williams]
NHL Open Ice [Williams]
Top Gun [Spectrum Holybyte]
Wipeout XL [Psygnosis]

4TH QUARTER 1996

2 Xtreme [Sony CE]
Andretti Racing '97 [Electronic Arts]
Area 51 [Williams]
Athanor [Psygnosis]
Batman Forever: The Arcade Game [Konami]
Battlestations [Electronic Arts]
Broken Helix [Konami]
Bubsy 3D [Accolade]
Burning Road [Playmates]
Castle of the Damned [Tecmo]
Contra: Legacy of War [Konami]
Crash Bandicoot [Sony CE]
Crypt Killer [Konami]
Dark Forces [LucasArts]
Deathdrome [Viacom New Media]
Discworld II: Missing Presumed...!? [Psygnosis]
Disruptor [Universal Interactive]
Epidemic [Sony CE]
Fade to Black [Electronic Arts]
Fatal Fury Real Bout [Sony CE]
Floating Runner [T*HQ]
Ganymede [Rocket Science Games]
Hexen [GT Interactive]
Iron & Blood: Ravenloft [Acclaim]
Island of Dr. Moreau [Psygnosis]
Jet Moto [Sony CE]
K-1 Super Kick Boxer [T*HQ]
King's Field II [Ascii]
Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
Madden NFL 97 [Electronic Arts]
Mega Man 8 [Capcom]
Mega Man X4 [Capcom]
Monster Rancher [Tecmo]
Monster Truck Rally [Psygnosis]
MTV's Aeon Flux [Viacom New Media]
MTV's Slamscape [Viacom New Media]
Namco Museum Vol. 2 [Namco]
NBA Jam Extreme [Acclaim]
NBA In The Zone 2 [Konami]
NCAA GameBreaker [Sony CE]
NFL Full Contact [Konami]
NFL GameDay '97 [Sony CE]
NHL 97 [Electronic Arts]
NHL Face Off '97 [Sony CE]
Pandemonium [Crystal Dynamics]
Perfect Weapon [American Softworks]
PGA Tour '97 [Electronic Arts]
Project Overkill [Konami]
Rebel Assault II [LucasArts]
Reloaded [Interplay]
Revelations: Persona [Atlus]
Robotron X [Williams]
Samurai Shodown III: Blades of Blood [Sony CE]
Shining Sword [American Laser Games]
Soul Edge [Namco]
Space Hulk: Vengeance of the Blood Angels [Electronic Arts]
Spawn [Sony CE]
Speed King [Konami]
Spot Goes to Hollywood [Virgin]
Star Gladiator [Capcom]
Street Fighter Alpha 2 [Capcom]
Suikoden [Konami]
Tecmo Thoroughbred Derby [Tecmo]
The City of Lost Children [Psygnosis]
The Divide: Enemies Within [Viacom New Media]
The King of Fighters '95 [Sony CE]
Tobal No. 1 [Sony CE]
Tomb Raider [Eidos Interactive]
Tunnel B-1 [Sony CE]
Twisted Metal 2: World Tour [Sony CE]
War Gods [Williams]
WWF: In Your House [Acclaim]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Air Combat 2 [Namco]*
Breath of Fire III [Capcom]
Castlevania: The Bloodletting [Konami]
Command & Conquer [Virgin]
Ghost in the Shell [TH*Q]
HyperBlade [Activision]
Kumite: The Fighter's Edge [Konami]
Pitfall 3-D [Activision]
Quake [GT Interactive]
Sentient [Psygnosis]
Spider [BMG Interactive]
Surreal [American Softworks]
Tenka [Psygnosis]*
World Championship Wrestling [TH*Q]



SEPTEMBER

Body Harvest [Nintendo]
Cruis'n USA [Nintendo]
Killer Instinct [Nintendo]
PilotWings 64 [Nintendo]
Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire [LucasArts]
Super Mario 64 [Nintendo]
TetrisPhear [Nintendo]
WaveRace 64 [Nintendo]

4TH QUARTER 1996

Blast Corps [Nintendo]
Buggie Boogie [Nintendo]
DOOM 64 [Williams]
FIFA International Soccer 64 [Electronic Arts]*
GoldenEye 007 [Nintendo]
Ken Griffey Jr. Baseball [Nintendo]*
Kirby's Air Ride [Nintendo]
Mortal Kombat 64 [Williams]
NBA Hang Time [Williams]
Robotech: Crystal Dreams [GameTek]
Super Mario Kart R [Nintendo]
Top Gun: A New Adventure [Spectrum Holybyte]
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter [Acclaim]
War Gods [Williams]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Alien Trilogy [Acclaim]
Creator [Nintendo]*
Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball [Acclaim]
Freak Boy [Virgin Interactive]
Hexen 64 [GT Interactive]*
Mission: Impossible [Ocean]
Monster Dunk [Mindscape]
POD [Ubi Soft]
Prey [Apogee]
Quake 64 [GT Interactive]*
Red Baron [Sierra On-line]
Robotron X [Williams]
Silicon Valley [BMG Interactive]*
Soul Storm [Virtual Hollywood]
StarFox 64 [Nintendo]
Super Mario RPG 64 [Nintendo]
The Legend of Zelda 64 [Nintendo–64DD]*
Ultra Combat [GT Interactive]*
Ultra Descent [Interplay]*
Wayne Gretzky Hockey [Williams]

This list is compiled from various sources including company releases and retail store guides. As such, all titles and dates are subject to change. Titles in RED are new additions to the list.

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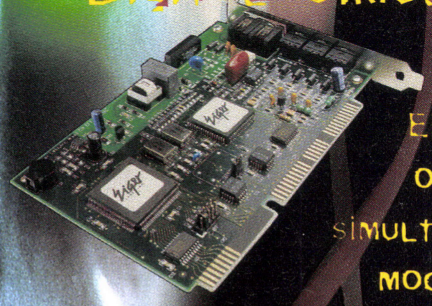
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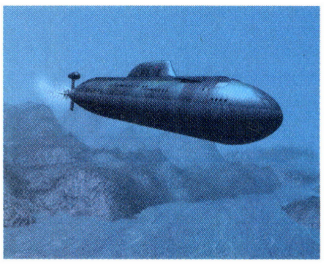
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The submarines in Red Alert are akin to the stealth tanks in the original Command & Conquer, which had the ability to decloak and wreak havoc.



Command & Conquer: Red Alert

Westwood's new strategy offering is sure to please fans of C&C

Publisher: Virgin

Platform: PC/Windows 95

Format: Double CD-ROM

Developer: Westwood

Release: September 1996

Long known for their excellent realtime, action-based, strategy games, Westwood Studios has consistently delivered some of the best PC titles throughout the years, most notably Command and Conquer's direct predecessor, Dune II. Command and Conquer certainly ranks among the best—a brilliant game whose addictiveness and playability is matched by very few other games.

The Command & Conquer universe is an ever-expanding one, with two all-new Command and Conquer games due out within the next 12 months. While Command and Conquer II: Tiberian Sun won't be out until some time in late 1997, C&C: Red Alert is right around the corner, due out in September for both IBM DOS and Windows 95.

Although Red Alert is the first sequel to Command & Conquer, it is actually a "prequel" relative to the Command & Conquer universe.

The story isn't set in stone like [Command & Conquer] nor is it nearly as simplistic.

The timeline of the game dates back to the World War II era of history, starting in the 1940s, while eventually progressing all the way into the near-present 1980s.

This game, however, is not an accurate representation of World War II, nor does it attempt to be. Expect history to be manipulated, and twisted in a rather interesting way. Red Alert presents an "alternate timeline" to the events that happened in the 1940s. The concept behind the story involves, Hitler being removed from power, while Stalin and the Soviet Union become the evil aggressor. Stalin attempts to take over Europe, which results in the creation of the opposing sides in Red Alert—

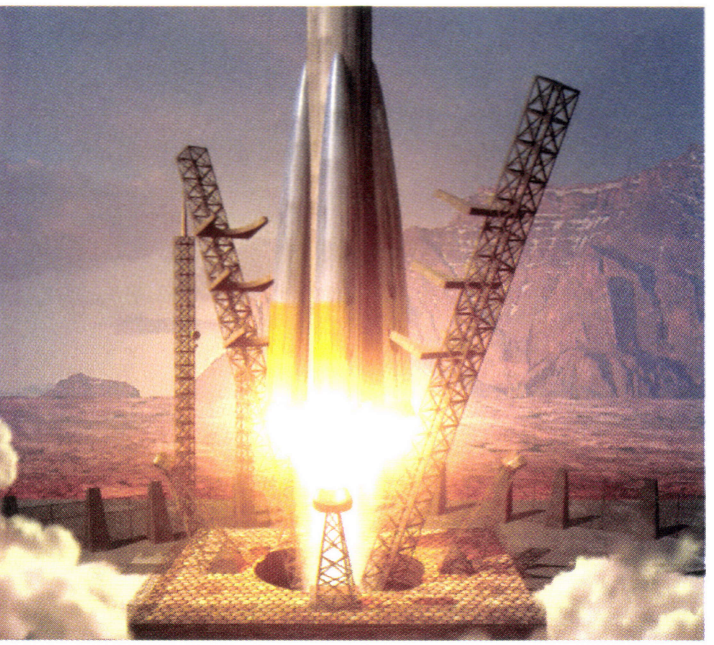


Red Alert's high-res imagery now allows you to see much more of the overall picture. Notice that the base on the upper part of this picture is getting pounded by some of Red Alert's new airborne units.

Europe versus Russia.

While this game may not directly involve the factions of GDI and NOD, the combatants in Command & Conquer, players can expect to learn quite a bit about them. Players will witness the two sides when they begin to grow and flourish, and will also find out about their origins and financial backers.

But the story isn't set in stone like its predecessor, nor is it nearly as simplistic. Red Alert will incorporate a non-linear story line whose outcome can be changed within the game. One of the main goals the designers of Red Alert wanted to do is to mesh the story



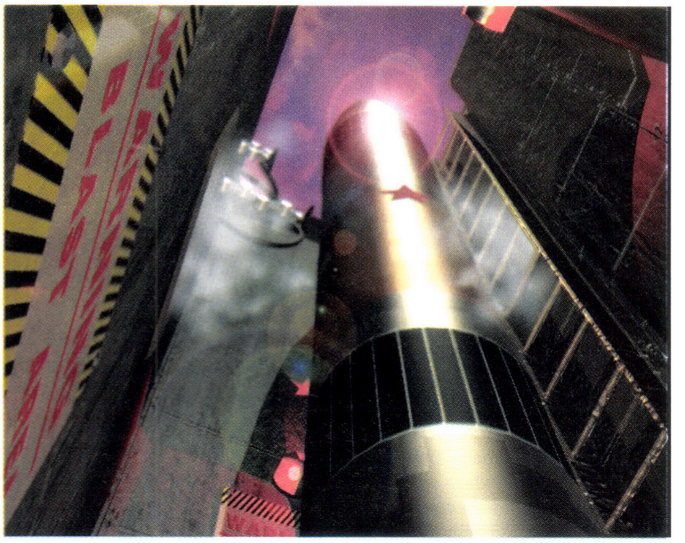
of the game with what takes place on the battlefield. There, of course, will be the familiar world map that contains several "branches" that allow the user to select the path, but these choices are only a small part of what determines the outcome of the war. The success or failure of certain missions will determine story changes, but additionally, certain actions taken during battles will invoke changes that are not part of the user's conscious decision. In an attempt to further add depth, certain characters will be introduced during gameplay that will play key roles within the game. If you lose the character midway through a game, that person is gone forever. This could make missions quite a bit more difficult, or change future missions altogether. One such character is what could be considered Red Alert's "commando"—a female, who wields two machine guns, with the ability to mow down groups of infantry at will, John Woo style.

The story isn't the only new item in Red Alert. In fact, just about everything in the game will be entirely fresh and unseen to fans of Command & Conquer. Gameplay will basically involve the same familiar concepts of C&C, although more emphasis will be placed on using several types of units and many more attack strategies. There will be a few familiar units and structures—things such as Construction yards, Mammoth Tanks and Engineers. But for the most part, this game deals with an entirely new set of units and structures. All of the graphics, regardless, have been re-rendered



to reflect the time period.

C&C fans should expect an entirely new collection of weapons to master. Since the game engine now features several avenues of



▲ Since the story line is so integral to Red Alert, Westwood's video production team has produced even better cinemas than in the original Command & Conquer.

land, sea and air attacks, armchair generals can now command a vast array of aerial weapons, naval battle groups and entirely new land units. Planes consist of bombers that drop either paratroopers or bombs, fast-moving MiGs, spy planes and infantry-chewing Yak's aircraft round up most of the air forces, while destroyers equipped with long-range artillery, submarines, P.T. boats, and unit-carrying water transport craft make up many of the naval craft.

While there are a large amount of air and sea weapons, conventional land units clearly have not been neglected. In fact, they might pack some of the best surprises.



▲ This is a sample of one of the new types of weaponry that can be found in C&C: Red Alert. Bombing now plays a significant role in air attacks.

For instance, one of your best weapons against infantry are ravenous Guard Dogs. If those don't quite do the trick, perhaps a large plot of mines, freshly distributed by a Mine Layer might help bolster the base defense.

One of the most unique avenues of attack in Red Alert is the battle for information. Units such as "Mobile Gap Generators" can generate a "black shroud" above units to shield them from enemy sight,

Just about everything in the game will be entirely fresh and unseen to fans of C&C.

and spies disguised as enemy units can be sent to enemy bases to find out every bit of information possible about them such as which units they are building, a look at their radar screen or even a look at how much money they have in the bank. Spy planes and Orbital Satellites can also be used to provide track battlefield movements.

Undoubtedly, one of Command & Conquer's strengths was its multiplayer and network ability. Red Alert builds on this by now allowing up to six players in a network game: The Windows 95 version includes a built-in TCP/IP



connect feature. Multiplayer maps will be larger, and additionally, there will be the option to save multiplayer games in progress. Additionally the game will offer a Cooperative Mode which pits multiple players in a battle against the computer, and a Skirmish Mode which enables players to practice their multiplayer tactics by pitting the gamer against a computer opponent that will build its own bases and attack much like a human would. There will also be a Map Editor included which will allow the creation of new multiplayer maps, which should add significantly to the lasting power of the game.

But there are other features aside from technical ones that will be added to head-to-head battle. Players will be able to choose to hail from several individual countries such as Italy or Russia before battle. Each country's units will be a bit different than the others. For example, Russia's tanks might have more armor, but will be a bit more sluggish on the move while Italy might pack more firepower, yet will have less armor. All of these options certainly give Red Alert a wide breadth of multiplayer options, something you can never have too many of.

Multiplayer maps will be larger, and there will be the option to save multiplayer games in progress.

With even more tricky and in-depth gameplay than its predecessor coupled with improved graphics and a huge dose of extra options, Red Alert appears to be the latest success-waiting-to-happen in a long line of outstanding Westwood realtime action war games. IG

http://www.westwood.com/

ISGREEN

IG recently spoke to Adam Isgreen, the co-designer of Command & Conquer: Red Alert.

IG: To what extent did you improve the gameplay over its predecessors?

AI: We put a lot of emphasis in this game on multiunit tactics. C&C used a lot of "rock-scissors-paper" strategy. For instance, a swarm of Mammoth Tanks will give you no guarantee of winning. In fact, you will probably lose to a small group of infantry. We've tried to make the game much more unpredictable. You will really have to watch what you're doing throughout the game. New units such as a Hijackers, Thieves, Guard Dogs and spies really shift the balance of the game around. They should give the players large doses of paranoia.

IG: Will Red Alert incorporate anything like WarCraft 2's "Fog of War" which makes the map only visible in areas that units are located?

AI: No, we don't want to hide entire maps. Red Alert will have the black shroud regenerate over time. This feature will be user-selectable, of course.

IG: Could you describe some of the new units?

AI: The two sides' unit's strengths and weaknesses are divided much like they were with GDI and NOD but differently. The Soviets are very armor-based, heavy, slow units. They pack a pretty good punch, but they can't move, and are slow to mobilize. The Allies are lighter, faster and can get more information than the Soviets can get.

For instance, one of these information weapons is the Spy. The Spy has no weapons, all he does is gather information. He looks like the target player's units, so the other player will see him as his own infantry. This can get really hectic in multiplayer. You might know the unit is a Spy because you can't control him, but you won't know which player is targeting you. The Spy allows you to see the other player's radar, how much money he has, what units he is building. Thieves allow you to steal money from other players. Hijackers can steal their mobile units and guard dogs can stop them. The attack dogs can sniff further than they can see. If they detect an enemy, they will begin barking and whining. If the infantry get too close, the dog will rip them apart.

"We put a lot of emphasis on multiunit tactics. C&C used a lot of rock-scissors-paper strategy."

IG: How about the new air and sea vehicles?

AI: The Allies are basically "naval-heavy." They have Cruisers, Destroyers and P.T. Boats. The Soviets only have Submarines, and both sides have transports, which are basically water-APCs. You can load infantry and tanks onto the transports. The Cruiser is powerful—the things can lob artillery across literally two screens. It has no defenses against anything up close, however. Your smaller water ships become the defenses for the larger ships.

The Soviet Air Force, on the other hand, is really deadly. MiGs are very fast, carry missiles and are great against armor. The Yaks are slow-moving planes armed with dual machine guns that are great for mowing down infantry. We also have a bomber which can drop parachute bombs or paratroopers. You also have a spy plane which is very fast.

IG: Is Tiberium (the money source for C&C) going to be involved?

AI: We've replaced it with ore. We wanted to add a little more to it, now having three types of ore. Instead of Tiberium, you now have Iron, Nickel and Copper. Each one is worth a certain amount of

ON RED ALERT

money per load. It adds a new strategic element to it, as you have to decide risk versus the amount that you get.

IG: With all of these new additions, will the game maps be any larger?

AI: Yes, they can go up to twice the size as C&C. We had to do that, to make it better for four to six players, which was crowded. We've got all kinds of crazy maps, such as very narrow and long ones, plus weird dimensions. There are a lot of strange missions in Red Alert. We came up with a bunch of new ways to do missions, and a lot of them involve these strange maps.

IG: To what extent have the mechanics of building bases and structures been altered or changed since C&C?

AI: What we have done is changed the rules a bit in Red Alert. Basically, buildings can now be built one cell away from each other, and turrets can be placed four cells away, allowing you to spread the base out a little bit more. The building rules on walls have also changed—you now only build walls (as opposed to structures) off of walls. You can no longer "spider leg" a wall of sandbags into your opponent's base and then build turrets.

IG: Speaking of defense turrets, could you describe some of the new ones?

AI: Oh, probably the favorite one of everyone that has seen them would be the Tesla Coils. They are these lightning-spewing towers. They really look great: They have beams of electricity that crackle, pop and fry the units. They are actually nastier than the Obelisks (from C&C). Everyone also likes the Flame Turrets. It's like having a Flame Tank that doesn't move. It shoots these huge fireballs that are great for cooking infantry. There are also camouflaged "pill-boxes," which blend in with the terrain. You can't see them until you're right on top of them. Each side has Mine Layer units. The Allies can lay anti-tank mines, while the Soviets lay anti-personnel mines.

IG: With the addition of Spies, Thieves and Hijackers, is the role of Engineers decreased in Red Alert?

AI: We toned down the Engineers. People really, really abused them in multiplayer on C&C. Basically, we took it back almost to the way you did it back in Dune II. You almost need to have a building destroyed to take it over. We do have Engineers and Renovators. You can send Renovators into a damaged building or bridge and boom, it's back to full strength.

IG: Bridges will play a large role in this game?

AI: Yes, boats can destroy bridges to get past them, we are purposely blocking areas off with bridges that must be destroyed. Some bridges are small, some long. You can actually trap a unit in the middle of a bridge by destroying the pieces around it.

IG: Any new buildings that are entirely new to Red Alert?

AI: Yes, it is hard to get away from certain buildings. You will see Silos, Refineries, Barracks, but you have new things like Kennels, Ship Yards, "Gap Generators" and Sub Pens. We put Tech Centers back into the game. We always kind of liked that in Dune II. You had to build a certain building to get new technology. There is a new, key building on each side that allows certain technology.

"There are definitely some missions that are nothing like what you've played in C&C."

IG: Any missions extraordinarily different from C&C?

AI: There are definitely some missions that are nothing like what you've played in C&C. We've introduced many new types of missions. You may even see some with a time limit counting down. There will be 40-45 missions total. You might also expect mission discs like the C&C "Covert Operations" disc.

IG: Anything you could tell us about Command & Conquer II: Tiberian Sun?

AI: Not a whole lot, it's still mainly in the planning stages, but the things that we have been talking about will be quantum leaps over what we have right now.

IG: Could you comment on the robotic soldier shown in the preview of it (on the Command & Conquer CD)?

AI: That "robot" is actually an example of body armor in Tiberian Sun. He's nothing compared to what's to come.

IG: A Saturn version of Command & Conquer has been announced: What could you tell us about that? (*IG* has also learned of a PlayStation and MAC version of C&C due out in late '96.)

AI: Not a whole lot, but I can say that it's running very fast, and looks good.

IG: Is this type of game conducive to a joypad? A lot of quick and precise movements are needed by what only a mouse could provide.

AI: Most unit movement on the Saturn will probably consist of grouping units to move them around.

▶ Activision took the best elements of extreme sporting games like Road Rash, ESPN X-Treme Games and Skate or Die, added their own unique elements, and came up with HyperBlade.

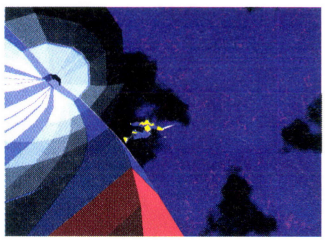


Hyper Blade

Activision takes extreme sporting into the future in HyperBlade

Publisher: Activision
Platform: Windows 95
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Activision/Wizbang
Release: 3rd Quarter '96

PC Sports games have avoided true 3-D environments long enough. HyperBlade is the first of its kind to break into the PC market, but distinguishes itself also as the first to base itself around an entirely new sport. Mix one part roller hockey, two parts lacrosse, a few traps and ramps, and an extra dose of encouraged physical contact, and you have the sport of the 21st century, HyperBlade. Set in a football-shaped bowl, players try to score points against the opposing team by grabbing the "rok," the name given to the ball, with their "jak," the name given to the blade-like stick, and slamming it into their goal. As with all sports, this is easier said than done, especially with the emphasis on physical contact. Opposing players have no qualms about knocking players on their backsides with checks, jak slashes and trips, and implement them as often and accurately as they can, thanks to some of the most aggressive and advanced AI on the market. Strategy is the key to success in HyperBlade. Not only does the player become the star member when playing, the allying players tactics revolve around the players moves, making it doubly important. Like most sports games, players can switch between team members, in this case by facing the team member the player wants to take over and hitting the appropriate button. Facing an unoccupied area and hitting the transfer button causes the player to hurl the rok, assuming the player has it, in that direction. This is a useful tactic for getting enemy AI players off of your back and attracting your players to the area the rok is thrown. Scattered throughout the field are various obstacles. In the version tested, ramps and bladed turnstiles had been implemented. Ramps give players an oft-needed vertical boost allowing them to score from a greater distance with the proper aim, as well as jump over approaching opponents. Bladed turnstiles remain stationary until a player skates through them to start them spinning. Once spinning, any player coming into contact will be thrown to the ground for a short amount of time, an ideal and satisfying way to down a pesky pursuant. Collaborations on the scale of that between Nintendo and Paradigm (Pilotwings 64) do not happen often, which makes it all the more surprising that HyperBlade's development mirrors it almost exactly. WizBang Software Productions, a simulation firm based in Seattle, Wash., developed both the AI and 3-D engine, while Activision teamed up with CGI firm Rhythm and Hues and audio team Soundelux to provide HyperBlade's visual and audio kick. As a result of this multifaceted collaboration, the development process for HyperBlade mirrors that of Nintendo's Pilotwings 64. WizBang's 3-D engine is fast, but compromises texturing in the process, which would bog down even the most hardy PCs to the point that HyperBlade would lose its speed-given edge. Soundelux's custom sound effects give the game an aural bite down to the last thud, an experience which is further enhanced with QSound stereo technology. Like Activision's recent titles, HyperBlade will be





▲ So far, in the early version we previewed, the color scheme isn't all too full of variety, but regardless, the graphics do look moderately cool given the genre and style of the game and how the game is played.

Players try to score points against the opposing team by grabbing the "rok" with their "jak."



▲ A few short months after the Windows 95 release of HyperBlade, a PlayStation version will be available. Given the type of graphics shown here, it shouldn't be a difficult port.

primarily a Windows 95 title, but will also support DOS. Windows 95 is recommended, however, as DOS will not have access to the DirectX drivers, without which the game will not be able to reach its full potential, mostly due to the implementation of Direct3D and DirectPlay. Direct3D will allow PCs equipped with 3-D boards and the appropriate drivers to play the game with textures added to the otherwise flat-shaded world. Activision showed HyperBlade at E³ last May accelerated with a Rendition-based accelerator card. The textures added a lot graphically to the game, but the frame rate was consistently higher than its flat-shaded counterparts. DirectPlay will give players the



▲ HyperBlade is shaping up to be a major title for fans of multiplayer gaming, with both Internet and split-screen support.

opportunity to compete via the Internet, but that will not be the only means of two player action. Currently planned is a single computer Two-player Mode, which will be presented in either an overhead or Split Screen Mode.

HyperBlade has all the makings of a winner: speed, looks, networkability and strong replayability. A PlayStation port is planned for



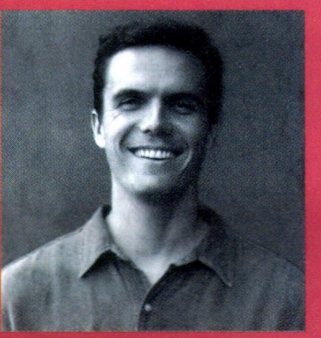
▲ Characters are made up of polygons that (as of this preview) look like they could use a little work—right now it looks like Virtua Fighter 1 on wheels...

release in early winter, and it will handle multiplayer gameplay through Sony's link cable, as well as the same single-machine Two-player Mode as the PC version, not to mention fully textured graphics, and possibly extra teams and game objects to interact with.

http://www.activision.com/

The Making of HyperBlade

To get a closer look at HyperBlade's development, *IG* interviewed lead producer Lewis Peterson. Relatively new to the industry, Lewis was previously a lawyer, serving in a handful of the nation's most prestigious law firms. A long-time gamer, Mr. Peterson dropped his practice to follow his dream of developing games. His first project was the production of Shanghai: Great Moments for Activision in 1995.



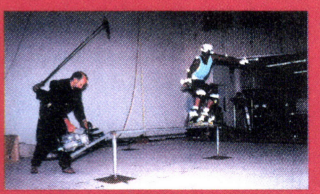
▲ Lewis Peterson

IG: Did Activision or WizBang come up with the concept for HyperBlade?

Lewis Peterson: HyperBlade has been jointly developed by Activision and WizBang Software Productions.

IG: How has the overall development of the game been split between Activision and WizBang?

LP: As much as you can imagine, the development process for



▲ Motion-capture technology was used to re-create lifelike animation for the characters in HyperBlade. Sensors detect and reproduce each individual movement.

HyperBlade has been like that of one team, just in two locations. Every project is developed slightly differently. For example, we have projects being developed completely out of house with only a producer in LA to keep tabs on the development. This project, however, was so fast-paced and feel-oriented that we felt the need to move some of our design people to Seattle, while we've kept the art direction and development in LA. WizBang actually approached us with a game concept some time ago. We liked their idea, but having no experience in mass-market games, our designers fleshed out the concept. The management of this project has been a little overwhelming at times due to the number of parties involved, so I split my time between Seattle and LA.

IG: What was the inspiration for the sport HyperBlade?

LP: From the beginning we wanted to make a sports game with speed and the resulting intensity, and WizBang had the idea of playing it within an ellipsoid bowl. WizBang's history in military simulations means they've been living and breathing 3-D for some time, allowing them to provide the correct fluidity and dynamics to the game's engine. These factors are especially important because the game is played on skates, making constant motion and speed key parts of the game. The process has been very interesting—a lot of the game's ideas grew from the technology itself. A big inspiration for the game were sports games that played well and were fun. We wanted a fast-paced, action-intensive game that relied as little as possible on stats. I'm a sports fan, but I want to get in there and mix it up rather than spend time managing the team and wading through stats.

"Frankly, it's easier for a company to provide stats for a big team sport in the place of gameplay."

IG: It's the whole issue of providing accurate detail without sacrificing gameplay.

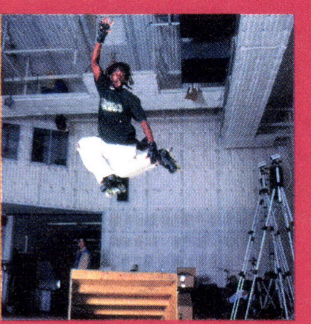
LP: That's right. Frankly, it's easier for a company to provide stats for a big team sport in the place of gameplay. That's one reason we came up with our own sport, so we wouldn't have to worry about stats too much and could focus more on the sport itself. Anyway, when a rollerball-type game developed, we wanted to bring in the violence associated with the sport. Not the bloody entrails type of violence, but the violence of bone-jarring checks and tripping. A lot of that, I guess, is me looking at sports and seeing the future of sports being very in-your-face with a lot of bumping and checking. Lately, basketball and hockey have become much more physical sports than they used to be. I wanted to deliver that to the next level.

IG: Out of all the CGI production companies in the LA area, why did Activision decide to work with Rhythm and Hues?

LP: A lot of firms were interested in working with us on this, including Digital Domain, who did a lot of work for MechWarrior 2. We had to turn them down because of the demands with the motion capture for this game. Interviewing the firms and viewing their demo reels showed that Rhythm and Hues' character animators and motion-capture technology were the best.

IG: Recently, Activision cancelled the Saturn version of HyperBlade. Will Sega's E³ announcement of the NetLink change this at all?

LP: I'm not the one who actually makes the decisions regarding which platforms we



▲ Another example of the strenuous (for the actor, anyway) work involved in shooting scenes for a sports-oriented computer game.

support, and, actually, I think it'd be a really good idea. PCs have a huge advantage these days thanks to their networkability, and it's interesting to see the Saturn attempt to bring that to its machine.



In addition to the strategic elements of Dungeon Keeper, players will be able to fill the shoes of any of their minions and control them, Doom style.

Dungeon Keeper

Bullfrog gives you 3-D control of dark armies and brutal traps

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Platform: PC
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Bullfrog
Release: Summer 1996

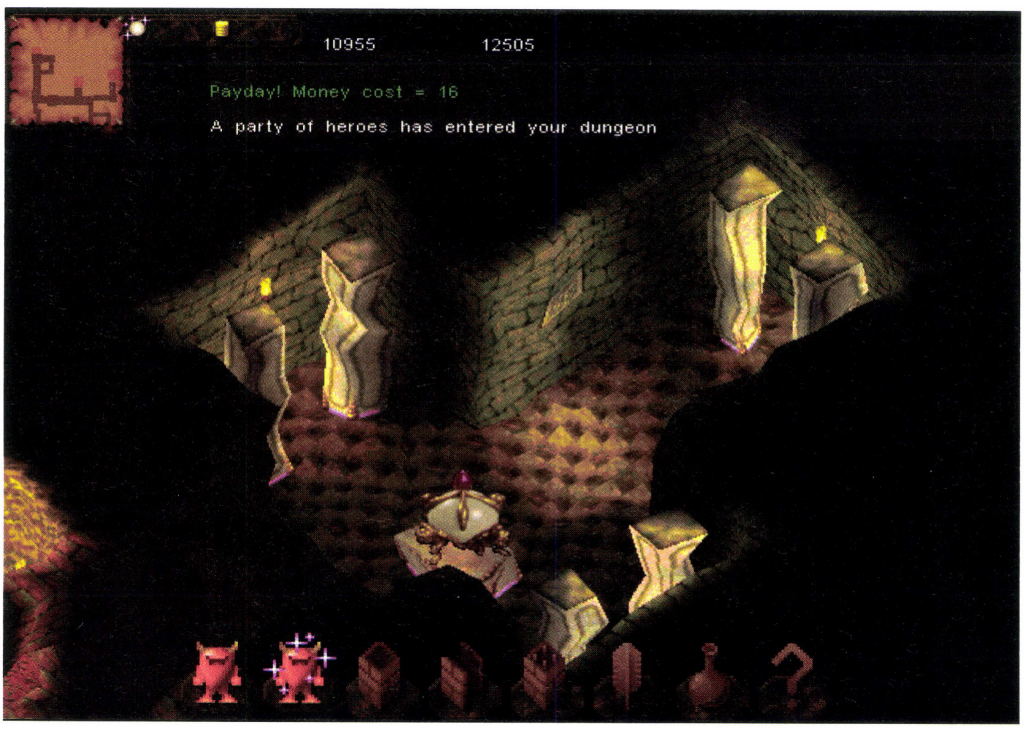
In recent years, Bullfrog's fame has grown exponentially thanks to original titles fraught with 3-D action and strategy. Bullfrog's reputation for quality 3-D games will only be furthered with the release of Dungeon Keeper, easily one of the most innovative games of the year.

Dungeon Keeper pits the player against all that is just and fair: You control a demonic creature from the underworld and players must construct dungeons beneath the sickeningly happy and green lands and defeat the lord of each realm to claim it for their own, blackening the landscape with blood and decay. In the process, players will have to manage an army of monsters, balance financial resources, research new spells and structures, and defend their dungeon from the realm's hardiest heroes. In an unusual collaboration between companies, Origin is allowing Bullfrog to kill Ultima's Lord British and Avatar in the final scenario, thus proving the player's deserved title "Ultimate Villain."



He's big, ugly and evil. It's a good thing he's on your side, protecting your dungeon from pesky heroes...

Dungeon Keeper has much in common with games like SimCity, but also combines heaping amounts of action into the mix. Players construct their dungeon from an overhead view of omniscience, ordering goblins and other nasties to construct tunnels, mine gold and build other structures, as well as worry about attracting new monsters, training the monsters they already have, and protecting their assets from invading monsters and heroes. Basic structures such as food pits and armories supply your evil hordes with nourishment and weaponry, while torture chambers allow players to sadistically vent on the brave heroes that penetrate their inner sanctums. Heroes may defect after torture, and should then be sent to the scavenger room, where the player's minions can attract their friends to join the player's



Based around the powerful Magic Carpet 2 graphical engine, Dungeon Keeper has astounding visuals, which will tax even the fastest Pentium.

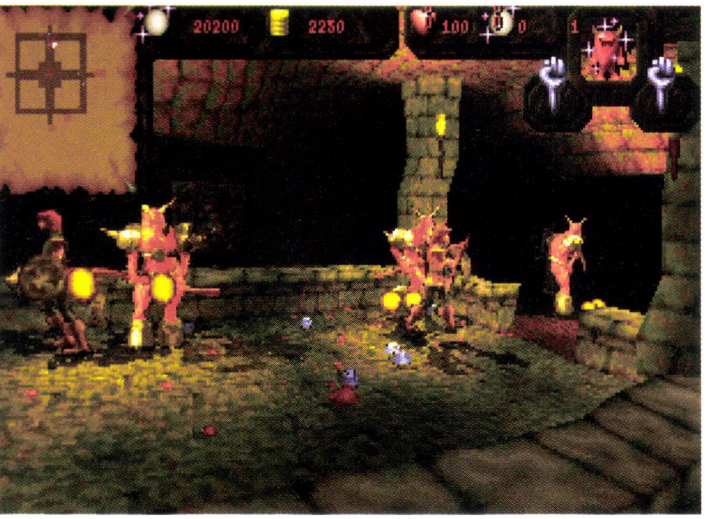
dank domain. Research into new dungeon chambers and spells will eventually transform your piddling hole of badness into an all-out mecca of the unholy.

As original as the game concept is, the strategy portion of Dungeon Keeper has been done before to some extent. What truly sets this game apart is the ability to possess any monster under your rule, and play the game from their first-person perspective, a la Doom. Every monster has its own abilities,



▲ The monsters in the game are prerendered sprites, while the intruding heroes are represented as fully textured 3-D objects, which is impressive for a PC title.

Unless you have an accelerator, a P166 cannot run the game in high-res with a reasonable frame rate.



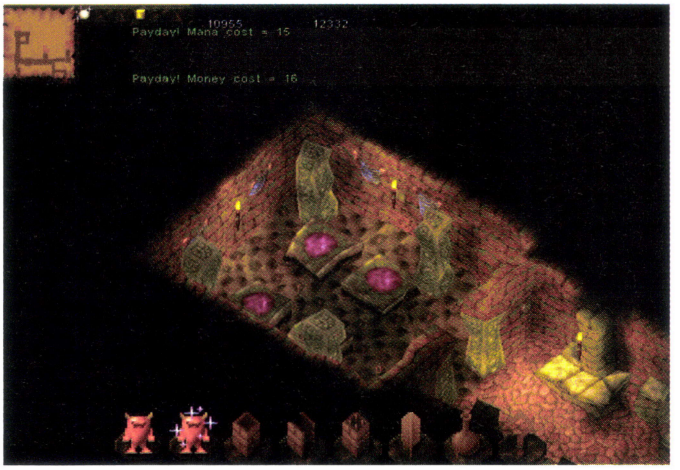
▲ Of course, if you fancy yourself as a General of Hell rather than a lowly footsoldier, you can have the computer play out your battles so you won't have to get your hands and claws dirty fending off treasure hunters.

strengths and weaknesses, as well as outlook on life.

Playing through the eyes of a giant ant will shift the perspective low to the ground and limits attacks to biting, whereas a wizard will have a more traditional view of the action and be able to cast

You can possess any monster under your rule and live the game through its eyes.

any spells available. While the player defends the dungeon, an appointed wizard or other intelligent monster will take over the menial management tasks of the dungeon, relieving the player of the strategy aspect and replacing it entirely with action. Players looking for only an action game can play the game as such, whereas players that are looking for pure strategy can rely on the AI of their monsters to vanquish intruders, making Dungeon Keeper the most genre-flexible game to date.



▲ When you're not busy torturing hapless knights and the like, the dungeon itself demands your attention. After all, you wouldn't want your own little corner of the underworld to go to hell from lack of maintenance, would you?

Dungeon Keeper's features are vast indeed. The 16 or so spells range in usefulness and purpose, but have greater effects in league with other spells. The gas cloud spell creates a noxious, but localized fog, limiting its use greatly. However, casting the wind spell will allow players to blow the cloud down a hall, greatly increasing its effectiveness. This is one of many spell combinations that not only adds depth to the game, but also a sense of experimentation. Dungeon Keeper's 3-D engine is an offshoot of the powerful Magic Carpet 2 engine, but adds a handful of new graphical flourishes. Fireballs illuminate fully textured hallways as they fly down them and lava ripples and casts light onto surrounding terrain. The monsters are all prerendered sprites, but heroes are jointed, fully 3-D objects, similar to those being used for the characters in Bullfrog's upcoming 3-D Superhero game, The Indestructibles. The overhead view presented while strategizing is fully 3-D as well, allowing players to rotate the perspective to suit their purposes, be it constructing or sending monsters to do battle.

Dungeon Keeper is a visual tour de force, but takes its toll on the CPU. Without acceleration, a Pentium 166 cannot run the game in 640x480 resolution with a reasonable frame rate. Fortunately, for those with 3-D acceleration boards the game has gone through the transition to Direct3D. DirectPlay provides multiplayer support via modem,



▲ Each character has his or her own attributes, which translate into different perspectives when the player is directly controlling them. For example, the insects of the dungeon are restricted to pincer-to-pincer attacks, as well as a low-slung Kafka-esque viewpoint.

network and TCP/IP Internet connection and takes multiplayer gaming in an entirely new direction. Up to eight people can play simultaneously, allowing up to four dungeon keepers to build dungeons and fight for the others' territory, with the other four players as heroes. This allows a variety of multiplayer combinations, such as one dungeon keeper versus seven heroes. Multiplayer gamers often like to tweak the games they play, and Bullfrog has made in-game tweaks easy to do. Players can modify monster and hero stats within Microsoft Excel, allowing them to edit the game's difficulty level however they choose. While multiplayer is a significant piece of this release of the game, Bullfrog will be releasing an Internet version of Dungeon Keeper later this year, touting an enormous capacity of 256 players.

Dungeon Keeper raises the ante on strategy and action games, but also pushes the envelope of 3-D technology and multiplayer gameplay in traditional Bullfrog style. Players have every reason to expect Dungeon Keeper to be one of the biggest titles of 1996, and Bullfrog has pulled out all the stops to make sure they deliver to those expectations. IG

http://www.ea.com/bullfrog/dkeeper.html

▶ Take the already impressive visuals of Beyond Oasis, add a touch of 32-Bit and better the animation, and you get The Legend of Oasis' gorgeous graphics.



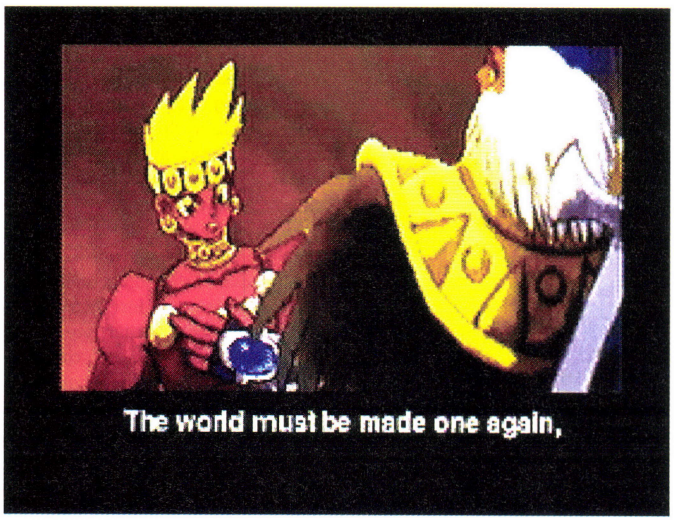
The Legend of Oasis

Ancient prepares to unleash the incredible sequel to Beyond Oasis

Publisher: Sega of America
Platform: Saturn
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Ancient
Release: 3rd Quarter '96

Over the course of the last year, the war of the next-gen systems (primarily Sony and their PlayStation Vs. Sega and their Saturn) has really begun to escalate. After their surprise May unveiling of the Saturn, Sega had a really poor summer, with only five to seven playable Saturn titles and virtually no third-party games ready until late September. That, coupled with Sony's enormously successful PlayStation launch on Sept. 9, really made things look grim over in the Sega camp.

With the media continuously hyping (and many times over-hyping) the PlayStation, many gamers felt that the Saturn was on the brink of extinction, and until just recently (beginning with the releases of Sega Rally, Virtua Fighter 2 and Virtua Cop in late 1995), their software lineup wouldn't have persuaded you to think any differently.

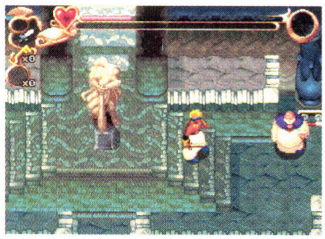


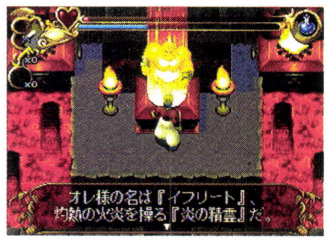
▲ The opening intro shows some really nice animated footage, but the sacrifice involved is instantly apparent: The screen has a huge border around the edges of the video, preventing any kind of full-screen viewing.

However, after those three key releases, Sega started to show signs of life once again, and began mounting a huge comeback. The second generation of Saturn titles are for the most part very promising, and Sega's lineup for the remainder of the year is at the very least, stellar. One of the key titles in Sega's menagerie is The Legend of Oasis, the sequel to their 24-Megabit Genesis Action-RPG, Beyond Oasis (known as Story of Thor in Japan), which showcased beautiful hand-drawn graphics, amazing sound effects (considering it was a non-CD Genesis game), and above-average music by the game's designer, Yuzo Koshiro.

Now, Koshiro and his development team (known as Ancient) are back, and are finally preparing to unleash The Legend of Oasis on the public. Released in Japan in April, and planned for a summer release here in the U.S., The Legend of Oasis is already shaping up to be one of the best games of the year for the Saturn, or for that matter, any home system.

Upon booting up the CD, you'll get to watch a fairly long animated introductory scene that explains the story of the game and the events that took place leading up to the start of the game. While the animation in the intro looks great and is highly detailed, the one downside is that it doesn't make use of the full screen, but rather takes up about two thirds of it. A minor grievance, but a grievance nonetheless.





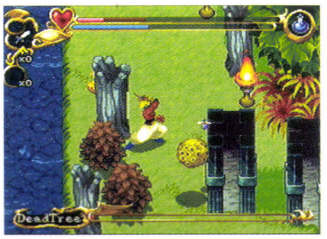
▲ Like most RPGs, much of the exploration in The Legend of Oasis takes place underground or in secluded or singular areas (forests, deserts, etc.). Each and every area provides a wealth of puzzling aspects that not only tax your fingers, but your brain as well.

The story line is a little bit more in-depth than in the first Oasis game. Many years had passed since Ali defeated Agito to restore peace to the land of Oasis. The two armlets vanished with time,

The Legend of Oasis is already shaping up to be one of the best games of the year.

and were nearly forgotten, until one day, Ordan, an elder of Oasis and keeper of spirit lore, stumbled upon the Golden Armlet, just as Ali did in the beginning of Beyond Oasis. Knowing that the Silver Armlet would again be possessed, Ordan passed on the Golden Armlet to his student, Leon, in hopes that he could prevent the minions of Agito from re-emerging with their master.

After a quick briefing from your master, you take the role of Leon and begin your quest. The main object of the game (at the outset, anyway) is to go out and retrieve the six elemental spirits that can



▲ Subtle objects like the beehive shown here can end up causing big problems. Let's just say you wouldn't want to jump kick it...

help you in your journey, two of which are all-new spirits that weren't in the first game. The gameplay in LoO is phenomenal. There are literally dozens of different techniques, in addition to special size increasing/decreasing items and various battle maneuvers, and there are puzzle aspects in nearly every corner of the game.

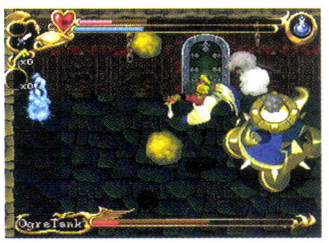
On the visual side, the graphics in LoO are beautiful. Each individual area is drawn in breathtaking detail, and just like in the original Beyond Oasis, a wide variety of colors are used. Character animation is quite impressive as well, with the main character sporting a variety of interesting moves and techniques, all animated very nicely. Unfortunately, the combo attack from Beyond Oasis (where you continually press the attack button to unleash a flurry of kicks and punches, culminating in a powerful attack) doesn't seem to be in LoO (unless you obtain it as a technique much later in the game, which we doubt), but for the most part, many of the moves from BO are still intact.

As for music, the soundtrack is composed by Yuzo Koshiro, composer of the soundtrack to the original Beyond Oasis, as well as such classics as Revenge of Shinobi for the Genesis, the Streets of Rage series for the Genesis, and Actraiser I & II for the Super NES. So far, the music is sounding good, although it's nothing absolutely extraordinary—yet. Sega is promising a long, enduring quest at least twice the size of BO, so there's always the chance that some of the tracks later on in the game may be a lot better. This same argument holds true with the game's graphics, too.

All in all, The Legend of Oasis is shaping up to be a huge hit, and RPG and action-RPG fans are going to be pleased with the final product. With Mystaria and Shining Wisdom already out, this one on the way, and games like Dragon Force, Dark Savior, Magic Knight Rayearth and others also on the way, the Saturn is quickly becoming the system of choice for RPG fans. Assuming the final translation is given a good touch of personality (let's face it—the one problem facing most RPGs today is poor, broken-up translations), you can bet that The Legend of Oasis will be one of the best action-RPGs ever created. Expect a full review in an upcoming issue of *Intelligent Gamer*. IG



▲ Before gaining the help of any of the six elemental spirits, you must first defeat one of the many Bosses from the game. The visual explosion after the first Boss fight (Undine) is really a sight to see; the still picture here doesn't do it justice. And that's just the first Boss...



▲ Leon has a variety of different maneuvers, including jump kicks, special weapon attacks, crawling attacks and more.

http://www.sega.com/

The Main Characters of The Legend of Oasis



LEON: The main character of the story, Leon must undertake a journey to find each of the elemental spirits to become the next Spirit King.



ORDAN: The foster parent of Leon, as well as his teacher of the military arts. Ordan is also an experienced soldier.



DYTTO: Dytto is the affectionate spirit that rules the waters of the world. She also has the ability to heal wounds and purify evil.



EFREET: The spirit of fire that rules with a fist of flames. The musclebound Efreet can control fire to burn out the impurities of evil.



BAWU: Bawu is the spirit that rules the greenery and Mother Earth. He is a charming and lovable character with a voracious appetite.



SHADE: The mysterious spirit that rules darkness and shadows. Shade is a defensive spirit that can mimic a shield and prevent falling.



BRASS: One of the two new elemental spirits, Brass is the ruler of sound. His sound-wave attacks can shatter even the hardest crystals.



AIRL: The second of the two new spirits, Airl is the ruler of the clouds and the sky. Her thunderous power is drawn from her violent, stormy temper.



ALI: The first Spirit King and keeper of the Golden Armlet. Now residing among the spirits, it was Ali who originally banished Agito in the first Oasis game.



AGITO: The wicked old magician and keeper of the Silver Armlet, Agito draws his evil power from destruction and terror. He is gathering his forces and planning his return.



MYRA: The beautiful black-haired Myra is a mysterious fortune-teller, believed by many to be a prophet.



▶ Battle scenes consist of medium-sized sprite-based characters fighting on huge battlefields with nicely drawn backgrounds.

Dragon Force

Working Designs' new Sim-RPG is shaping up to be a big winner

Publisher: Working Designs
Platform: Saturn
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Sega of Japan
Release: 3rd Quarter '96





▲ In-game cinematics are played out in Japanese anime-style still sequences (that periodically change, of course) while text runs along the bottom of the screen. Artwork is of very high quality, and while you can't see it in pics–he music is almost always very fitting.

Although extremely popular in Japan, strategy/sim RPGs inherently involve many of the same problems that keep regular RPGs from U.S. shores—larger than average amounts of text to translate, a high level of difficulty, and more complexity than most U.S. companies think is fair to expect from a U.S. audience. Unfortunately, this kind of reasoning ignores the growing number of more mature and sophisticated gamers who crave something more than flashy graphics or the latest polygonal craze—gamers who want depth to their games, who don't mind using their brains as well as their reflexes. Luckily for those gamers, Sega's Dragon Force is just such an involving and enjoyable game, and Working Designs, a company built on bringing over quality titles others would just as soon leave in Japan, is translating it for U.S. audiences for release this summer. Combining the RPG elements of character building with the addictive action qualities of its unique battle system, Dragon Force is state-of-the-art Strategy-RPG gaming that is sure to catch a second look even from those who are not usually fans of the genre.



▲ Monkey Boys, err, Monks, are very good in hand-to-hand combat, relying on their martial arts skills to do battle.

Dragon Force takes place on the continent of Legendra—a land recently plunged into chaos as each of the eight countries it contains battles for supremacy. After choosing your homeland from six of these kingdoms (the other two are also available later), you assume the role of its leader and begin your quest—to conquer your enemies and ultimately unite them against a much greater evil which threatens you all.

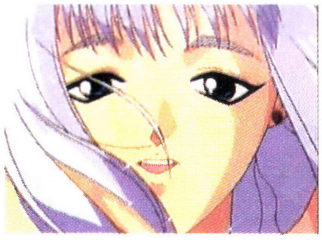
Besides having a different king or queen, each kingdom starts with a number of troops, one or two castles and four generals to assist in command. Castles are important in that, depending on their size, they offer a replenishing resource of troops to add to your growing army. Generals in Dragon Force are like party members in conventional RPGs—each has his own name, picture, spells and stats. They can use items to increase their abilities and equip different kinds of armor and weapons. Generals are the backbone of your army—in combat, you command the formation and attack strategies of your troops through them, and they are the only members of your army who can cast spells. Off the battlefield, generals can search for magic items, oversee improvements to your castles (increasing the number of troops they produce and can hold) and lead troop movements across your domain.

Choosing the right battle plan can mean the difference between victory and defeat.

Armies are formed from one or more battalions of troops, each commanded by a separate general. Once two opposing armies meet, the computer and the player choose a battalion to fight with, then an appropriate formation and attack plan. After battle begins, the player has no control over his armies other than changing their attack formations—each individual soldier is computer controlled and fights automatically when he reaches the enemy. It is important to note that combat continues only until either general surrenders or is defeated—it is not always necessary to kill all of the enemy troops. This is where the true strategy of Dragon Force begins to take shape. Because of the unique characteristics of each general and the 10 different types of troops they can command (see sidebar), choosing the right battle plan can mean the difference between victory and defeat. Do you form your troops into a wall and command them to hold their ground against the enemy, or separate them into multiple factions and attack on two fronts? Should you go after the enemy grunt soldiers, or try to avoid them and take out their leader instead? Where many strategy games fail is in the battles—often they seem to

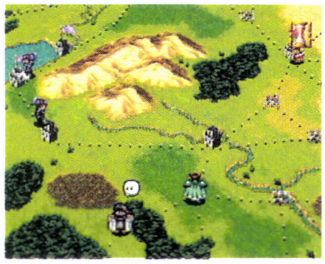
become a battle of statistics and percentages, with the player feeling left out. But with realtime combat, your generals' powerful spells and special attacks, and the ability—often the necessity, to adjust your strategy as the battle progresses, Dragon Force keeps the player thoroughly involved.

By winning battles, your generals earn levels and with them new spells, increased stats and the opportunity for promotion. When a general is promoted, it increases the maximum number of troops they can command by 10. After each week in game time, there is a small break to take care of administrative duties—including deciding who will get the promotions your army has earned in the past week.



▲ Just one of the many important characters in Dragon Force, this one showcased in the second opening intro screen—a full screen (and impressive) anime sequence.

Although you don't have to give promotions to the commanders who earned them, if you skip over a deserving general too often they can become angry and may defect. On the other hand, if you always promote only those generals who are winning the battles, you may find yourself with a few extremely powerful leaders while the



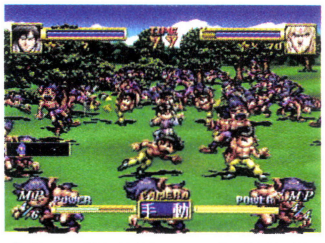
▲ As in past strategy/simulation/RPG-style games, the Overhead Map Screen ties the rest of the game together, and is of major importance.

majority of your generals are so weak they will never earn their own promotions, continuing a vicious cycle. Because there are always precious few promotions to distribute among all your generals, promotion is one of the most important aspects of the game, and must be done carefully. Also during this administrative period, you can ask captured enemy generals to join you, search your castles for new generals or magic items, bolster the capacity of your castles and save your game.

Taken individually, the graphics that make up Dragon Force could only be described as average, but this does not tell the whole story. The battlefield is basically flat, with some scattered scenery (trees, bushes, rocks, etc.) and small, anime-styled sprites used for the soldiers. You are allowed to choose any of four preset camera positions to view the action from, including a computer-controlled "auto" camera and one you can move yourself with the joypad—but the camera can only move left and right or in and out of the battlefield. Everything scales smoothly in adjusting to the camera position, but sometimes results in some pixelization up close, and the camera never moves "around" the action—everything is kept strictly 2-D. Strategy games are not known for eye candy, and Dragon Force is far from the most impressive graphics the Saturn has seen. However, that having been said, combine all these elements in an actual battle, where it is possible to have literally hundreds of troops squaring off, and the visual effect is not only impressive, but perfectly conveys the utter carnage and total chaos of all-out war. By using the aforementioned smaller sprites and a somewhat simple battlefield, dozens and dozens of warriors can be on the screen all at the same time, all battling in realtime without even a hint of slowdown. So while each sprite taken separately may not be all too impressive, the way the graphics are used and the feeling it gives the player are perfectly matched, and ends up adding quite a bit to the overall experience and intensity of Dragon Force.

The music is well done, with a grand orchestrated feel, but is usually only faintly heard in the background, content to subtly add to the mood of Dragon Force. Sound effects are much more pronounced—the screams of your soldiers as they are let loose into the fray is especially memorable.

By using smaller sprites and a simple battlefield, dozens of warriors can be on the screen all at the same time.



▲ Some of the battles can get quite hectic, with literally dozens of fighters on-screen at any given time.

Spells whiz and crunch their way through the enemy lines as they fly across the screen, and each time you lose a battle you hear a great "Aawwwwww," lest you forget your horrible failure.

With all the elements that made games such as Shining Force and Ogre Battle great and plenty of its own original aspects, Dragon Force brings the Strategy-RPG genre beautifully up to date on the Saturn. Although it might not be the mind-blowing audio/visual feast so much 32-Bit software promises, it offers something few of those games can—engaging gameplay and thorough replay value. Once again, hats off to Working Designs for knowing a good game when they see it. IG

No Web Address Available

Dragon Force's Class System

All armies are not created equal, so knowing the strengths and weaknesses of each character class is extremely important in Dragon Force. Each class has strengths and weaknesses that can be affected by the terrain of the battlefield and who they are fighting against. Here's a brief summary of each of the 10 classes you can command...



SOLDIER

Your standard fighter, he is well armed and does well, if not spectacularly, against most other classes.



FIGHTER

Very similar to the soldier, these samurai warriors are probably the most common class.



MONK

Without weapon or armor, monks are fairly quick on their feet, and their kicks can pack quite a wallop.



DRAGONIAN

Very fast, well armored, and deadly, the dragonians are easily the best all-around class in the game.



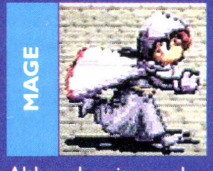
ZOMBIE

Somewhat rare, these living dead can make an effective addition to your army—keep them away from the monks.



HORSEMAN

High atop their mounts, with trusty lance in hand, horsemen are very quick and effective fighters, as long as they have room to maneuver.



MAGE

Although quite weak in close combat, mages can hit the enemy with fireballs from all the way across the field—use them carefully.



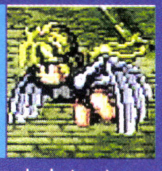
ARCHER

Like mages, archers are great when the enemy is far away, but if the enemy makes it to your frontline—kiss your archers goodbye.



BEAST

These wild men sprint across the battlefield on all fours, and use their hind legs to kick the enemy like a mule. Very dangerous in large numbers.



HARPY

Although their wings usually afford them quite a bit of speed, harpies can also be drastically affected by the terrain they are fighting on.



Featuring a plot right out of a straight-to-video sci-fi movie, Steel Harbinger stars Miranda, a partially mutated teenager who must save the world from an alien invasion.

Steel Harbinger

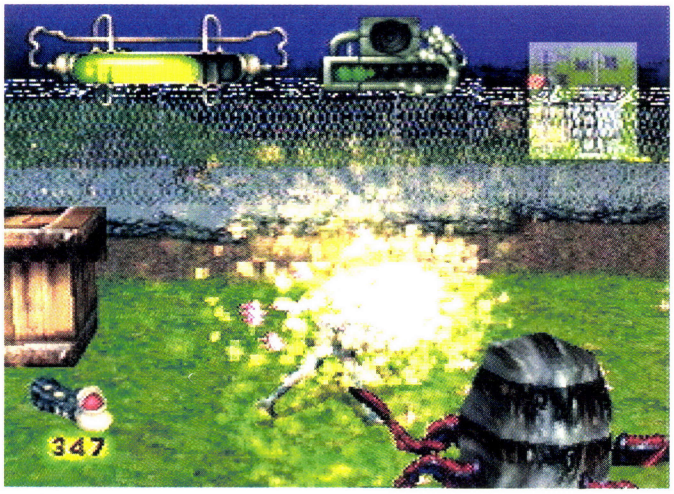


In the tradition of classics like Robotron:2084, Mindscape readies an impressive fast-action twitchfest

Publisher: Mindscape
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Mindscape
Release: September 1996

Mindscape has not been known in the past for making successful console games, but it appears that their reputation could be in for a change.

Set in the year 2069, Steel Harbinger is an impressive realtime 3-D action title set in the ruins of 11 or more major U.S. cities and remote locations from Antarctica to the moon. Both the premise and implementation are unique: In an only slightly funny FMV opening, an alien invasion is afoot and lasers, alien creatures and meteorites are raining down from the heavens; crashing in huge cities and killing or infecting masses of people with foreign DNA mutations. Scientists struggle to understand the alien plague as citizens are transformed into metallic shadows of their former selves, and one research facility brings in a captured alien creature for observation.



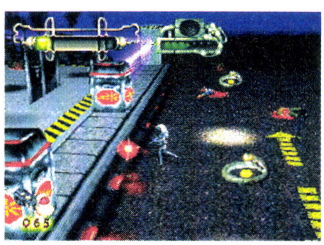
The action in Steel Harbinger is presented in a three-quarter overhead view, with the player having control over the zoom factor of the camera. Terrain is detailed, as are the numerous sprite-based enemies that the player must destroy.

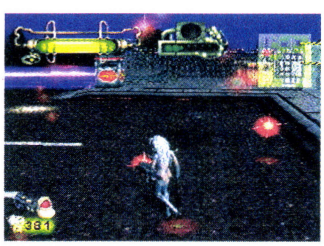
As one doctor studies the alien, it cracks its holding tank and grabs hold of the doctor's daughter, Miranda. Despite a heroic effort to cut her loose before infection takes place, Miranda immediately succumbs to the alien's virus, and the entire compound is levelled shortly thereafter, killing almost every inhabitant. The only survivor: a very angry Miranda, whose body is now half steel and half human flesh. Her goals are to rescue the humans who remain on the planet, kill the aliens and mutated humans who cover the streets and perhaps even solve the mystery of how the aliens and their plague operate. Is Miranda's warped body a steel harbinger of what's to come, or will she beat back the invasion single-handedly?

Is Miranda's warped body a harbinger of what's to come, or will she beat back the aliens single-handedly?

You're immediately placed in control of Miranda in the center of a city torn apart by the alien invasion, and your perspective is a slight three fourths overhead view which can be zoomed in and out at will (as was the case in Interplay's Loaded). Armed initially with a laser pulse gun, Miranda runs and jumps through entirely realtime-rendered 3-D worlds which look surprisingly impressive: The aliens have set up armed polygonal guard towers and glowing laser force fields which are disarmed through repeated discharges of your ammunition, and sprite-based mutated people and animals roam the streets. Detailed cities have 3-D hills, homes and buildings which move in proper perspective and give the viewer a terrific sense of depth, and the 3-D engine provides for realistic shading that fades new scenery in quite seamlessly. The camera gently rotates slightly to the left and right as you walk to make the world look more dynamic.

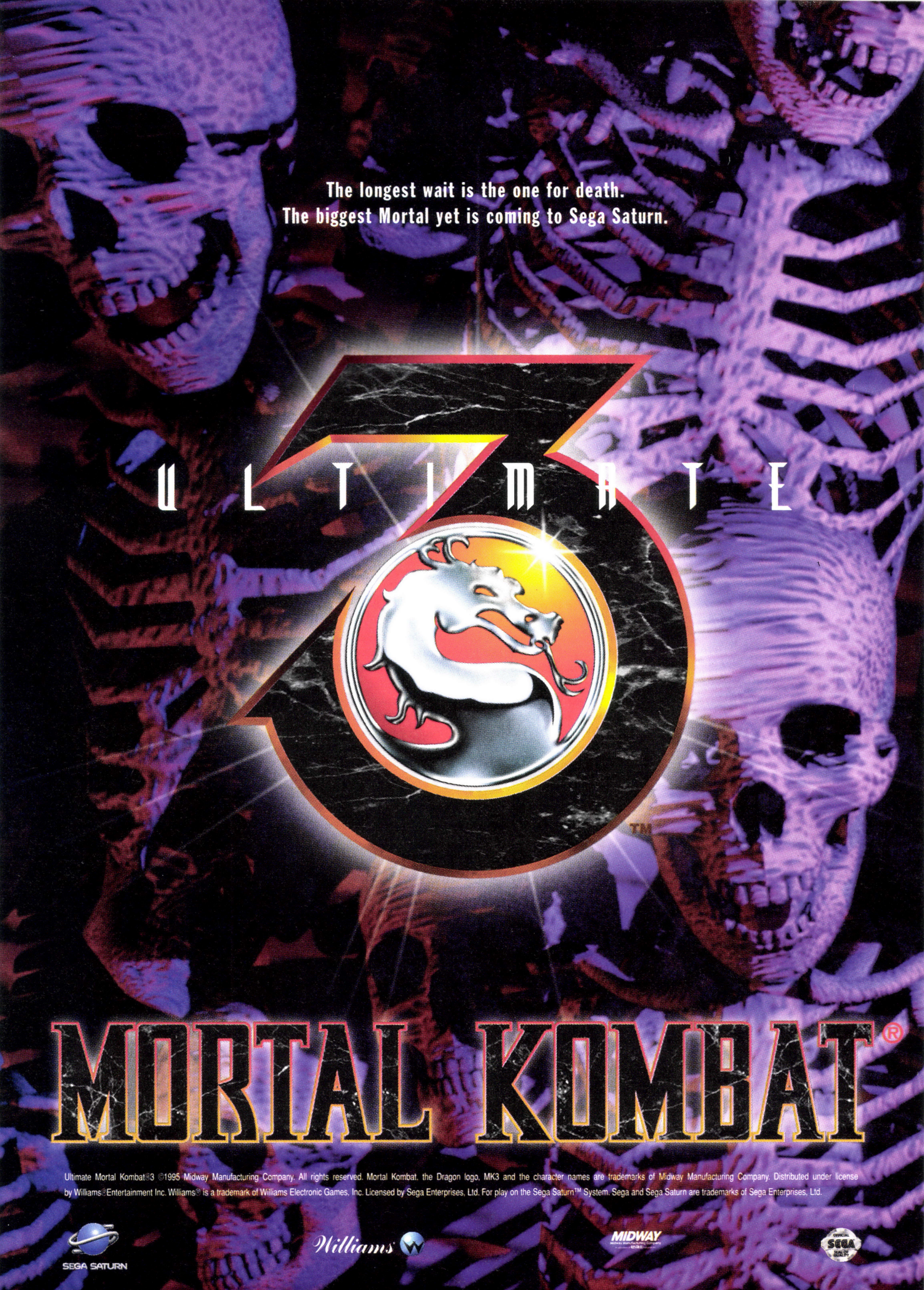
Gameplay at the moment is simple but enjoyable: Unlike Loaded, where the goal was to obliterate everything in sight while searching for keys, Steel Harbinger is paced in a Choplifter vein—you spend a lot of time exploring the landscape for humans who are either running around or hiding in houses, and you knock off enemies who are running around infecting people and blowing things up. Controls allow you to run, jump, shoot, and change weapons with ease, and Mindscape promises both vehicle-travel scenes and multiple means by which the game can be completed. We're looking forward to receiving a final version of Steel Harbinger for review. IG





Steel Harbinger plays very much like Interplay's Loaded, except that the heroine of Steel Harbinger also has to worry about rescuing the remaining unmutated humans.

http://www.mindscape.com/misc/steel.html


The longest wait is the one for death.
The biggest Mortal yet is coming to Sega Saturn.
ULTIMATE
3
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▶ Of the two view options, the nose view was harder to handle due to the speed at which objects approached. Full view offered a better perspective of the course ahead.

Wave Shark

Konami covers new ground in the interactive coin-op arena

Publisher: Konami
Platform: Arcade Coin-op
Format: N/A
Developer: Konami
Release: Late Summer

IG's editors were recently invited to Konami's U.S. headquarters in Buffalo Grove, Ill., to preview their brand-new jet ski racing arcade machine WaveShark. After a couple of hours of playing and chatting about the design had ended, we had to ask Konami, "Just why hasn't anyone designed a game like this before?"

Perhaps game developers thought the idea of standing on a full-size pivoting jet ski in front of a 50-inch monitor was just too expensive or sophisticated for arcade operators or vendors, but with the success of Namco's downhill skiing arcade machine Alpine Racer and other pioneering "participant interactive" games, the arcade-beached jet ski's time has come.

Konami's WaveShark is pretty straightforward: Players race against either four other computer-controlled riders or three other human riders when multiple machines are linked together—the maximum number of linked machines is four. Participants have three race courses to select from, available under the only moderately ambiguous Novice, Expert and Pro. Novice offers a good challenge for the average person but is easily winnable after a couple of plays; Expert and Pro require the player to master the nuances of leaning the machine into corners and jumping waves to actually win the race. Pulling back on the handle bars pulls the nose of the on-screen ski up out of the water and helps the ski catch air over waves and jumps. Leaning left or right makes the ski cut hard in the direction you've leaned in.

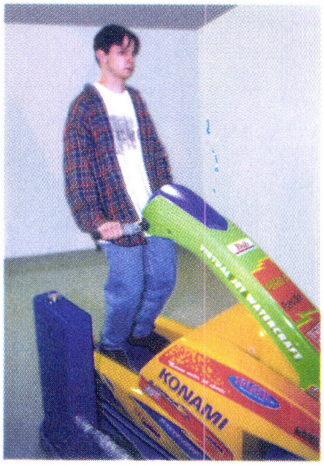




▲ A view from the player's perspective. The handle bar assembly stays stationary with about three inches of travel for pulling up the nose of the ski when catching air off the waves. Turning may be facilitated by using the handle bars or by leaning left or right.



▲ WaveShark is the first "participant" arcade game to offer players more physical control than just the standard leaning as is the case with games like Suzuka 8 Hours.



As the on-screen ski hits other riders or skitters over choppy water, the ski underfoot moves accordingly.

You assume the identity of one of four playable characters; two are expert riders, two are novice. The lone woman jet skier was added to the U.S. version of the game at Konami of America's request. Two standard views are available—a view from behind the jet skier and one of just the nose of the vehicle. In general the full-view rider perspective was the most functional.

Processing duties are handled by an enhanced version of the Power PC 603 CPU used in both Midnight Run and Winding Heat. While the graphics are on par with any of the top games currently in the arcades, they are not earth shattering. As was the case with Alpine Racer, however, the visual element alone isn't the only draw, because the game will grab players with its uniqueness and sheer playability alone.

WaveShark takes players on a heart-pounding romp past shorelines, through canal-like waterways, over gigantic waves and through narrow tunnels. As the on-screen ski hits other riders or skitters over choppy water, the ski rig under your feet moves accordingly. With the combination of the physical manipulation of the machine and the excitement of the race, it's clear that this type of interactive and fun simulation entertainment will just continue to grow in importance in the future.

And WaveShark most definitely is a lot of fun. Expect to see crowds of curious gamers around this machine (as there were at this year's ACME show) when you get to arcades, so have your dollar ready when it's your turn to display your water-treading prowess. IG

http://www.konami.com

Konami of America President Ken Dirnberger

While in the office previewing WaveShark, *Intelligent Gamer* editors had the chance to talk to Konami of America's president, Ken Dirnberger.

IG: Please tell us what your job entails from day to day.

Ken Dirnberger: There are two separate Konami companies located in this building. Konami (America), Inc. is responsible for marketing and sales of Konami products (both coin-op and consumer games) in the North/South American territories. It was founded in Los Angeles in 1982, and moved to Chicago in 1984. The other company, Konami Computer Entertainment Center, Chicago (KCEC), is a game software development company, founded by our Chairman and CEO, Mr. Kozuki, in late January of last year for the purpose of creating coin-op and consumer games—specifically for the U.S. market. It is my pleasure to be the president of these two closely related Konami companies.

On a day-to-day basis, I do what you would expect a senior manager of a Japan-headquartered foreign subsidiary to be doing—coordinating and communicating with headquarters for one thing, and overseeing the activities of the two companies. I am fortunate to have a very capable executive staff who are experts in their areas, and do their best to keep me out of trouble. I've been in the position just over one year now. I can tell you that I am having a great time—and the most exciting part is right now because we are in the fortunate position of having sensational new products that we are currently launching. What makes it even more exciting is that our new R&D company (KCCE) is already contributing to that product line-up and has become a major development force within its first year of operation.



▲ Ken Dirnberger



IG: Many of Konami's most successful home games were originally developed by your company's Japanese arcade division. What, in your view, accounts for the fact most of Konami's U.S. releases for 32-Bit systems nowadays have been original sports titles? Do you feel that the market for arcade translations is in decline?

"I've been in the position just over one year now. I can tell you that I am having a great time."–Ken Dirnberger



KD: Konami has had a long history of bringing its many arcade game successes to the home market and that will continue–a year from now, give me a report card on how accurate this prediction was.

Concerning the sports question. This was no accident–it was deliberate and careful target-market planning. A year ago, we put together a product planning focus group which projected the primary 32-Bit consumer to be somewhat older than the average 16-Bit gamer, and guess what? This new primary audience is into sports, big time! So it was a natural strategic move to hit this area hard as our major focus.

IG: What sorts of differences are there between the Japanese and U.S. arcade and home markets?

KD: Japanese and American home markets are about the same. It is in the coin-op/arcade area that the greatest difference becomes obvious. The Japanese tend to go for huge family amusement/game centers in a big way. In fact, Konami owns and operates several of these family centers. A typical center may have several (3-4) floors, with each floor offering a different kind of activity, varying from children's games on one floor to traditional video games on another. One Konami center I've visited in Japan even had a large amount of floor space dedicated to Karoke booths. What is missing in Japan is the small coin-op "street operation," where a store manager places a few machines in a corner somewhere, serviced by a route operator.

IG: The home video gaming market is now full of competing consoles and personal computer formats. Who will be the winners and losers?

"Konami has had a long history of bringing its many arcade game successes to the home market."–Ken Dirnberger

KD: You posed this same question to my consumer division president, Mr. Donchak, some weeks ago. My answer is the same–too hard to handle at this time because technology is changing too fast to make a prediction. I don't intend to count out any of the major hardware providers. They know their business, and will be looking to keep Konami as a strategic partner. We intend to continue developing high-quality, fun games for any hardware platform with an installed base that justifies our cost and effort.

IG: What will be the main difference between Konami today and Konami five years from now?

KD: Konami went through a slow period as the 16-Bit market slumped and the arcade business flattened out. But our company's commitment to the U.S. market has never flagged, and our chairman/CEO is more determined than ever to reward our loyal customers by restoring the wealth and breadth of fun games that we offer across the entire spectrum of our industry.



Will Konami be releasing licensed (i.e., X-Men, TMNT, Simpsons) titles any time in the near future?

KD: Most of our consumer sports products are already licensed. As you know, we've also had very successful coin-op licenses in the past, and we will most certainly take advantage of any licensing opportunity that adds the right kind of value to our planned product lineup. We don't secure licenses just because they look good–they have to fit. As for future arcade games, I can't tell you about titles we haven't announced yet. In the coin-op arcade area, our jet ski simulator (WaveShark) was introduced at ACME in March. It was a major hit at the show and our customers are pushing us hard to get it on the street—it will be released in mid-summer. Our second major coin-op offering will be a driving game with an entirely new and exciting look. If you liked Midnight Run, you'll come back to drive Winding Heat over and over again. This one is going out on test this month, and will also be launched in the U.S. this summer. Stand by for more Konami fun!

IG: Thank you for your time Mr. Dirnberger. We look forward to seeing the games this summer.

One of the biggest differences between Winding Heat and Midnight Run is the country Vs. city atmosphere. The other major factor is greater amount of cars available in Winding Heat.



Winding Heat

Konami reloads with yet another arcade driving simulation

Publisher: Konami

Platform: Arcade Coin-Op

Format: N/A

Developer: Konami

Release: Late Summer



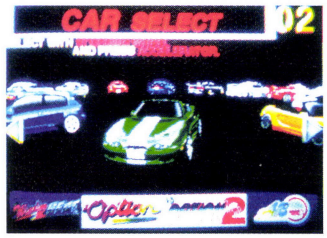
▲ It's easy to find yourself in tough situations in Winding Heat–driving on the wrong side of the road speeding toward a five-ton Winnebago.

In the tenth issue of *Intelligent Gamer's Fusion*, our editors put Konami's Midnight Run through its paces in an exclusive preview at Konami's U.S. headquarters. Now, just three months later, as Midnight Run is gaining popularity in arcades, Konami has unveiled the game's souped-up sequel, Winding Heat. After having so much fun with Midnight Run, we were especially thankful to receive an invitation once again to test drive Konami's newest driving machine.

Winding Heat uses the same processing board as Midnight Run (a PowerPC 603 along with the 3-D Spatializer Sound™ system), yet the variety of advancements over Midnight Run are many. Perhaps the biggest change is the addition of 10 more cars over the original—players may select "look-a-likes" of the Porsche 911, Lamborghini Countach, Mazda Miata, Honda Civic and several others. But, much to our disappointment, there weren't any Corvettes! We had to ask why, and Konami reassured us that steps may well be taken to add the U.S. muscle car to the lineup before the game's late summer release.

The Corvette matter aside, Winding Heat leaves behind Midnight Run's manic city driving experience and puts the player in more rural settings for the game's three tracks. Also new are the five performance enhancers offered at the onset of the game: Handling, Grip, Acceleration, Normal and Max Speed. More new features include puffs of exhaust when you're accelerating and even backfire animations when you suddenly apply the brakes. Expect to see jets and even hang-gliders pass overhead in some parts of the game, though you'll probably find yourself ignoring the non-essential artwork most of the time—there are now large numbers of oncoming cars barreling toward you in the other lane, another new feature. Time Attack may be selected to eliminate oncoming traffic.





▲ Notice the shifting knob is on the left side of the driver. Many arcade owners considered that reason enough not to order the machine for their arcades. Due to that response, Konami offers models with the shifter on the right side.

Konami listened to its fans and produced an even better driving machine for the legions of racing sim fanatics.

Konami listened to its fans and produced an even better driving machine for the legions of racing simulation fanatics, but managed to distinguish their two titles enough from each other that two machines could sit next to each other and draw equivalent crowds. As Winding Heat is a high-end arcade piece, anxious fans may have to look for the game at larger arcades, but we strongly feel that the search will be worth it. IG

Konami's Marketing Manager Richard Rush

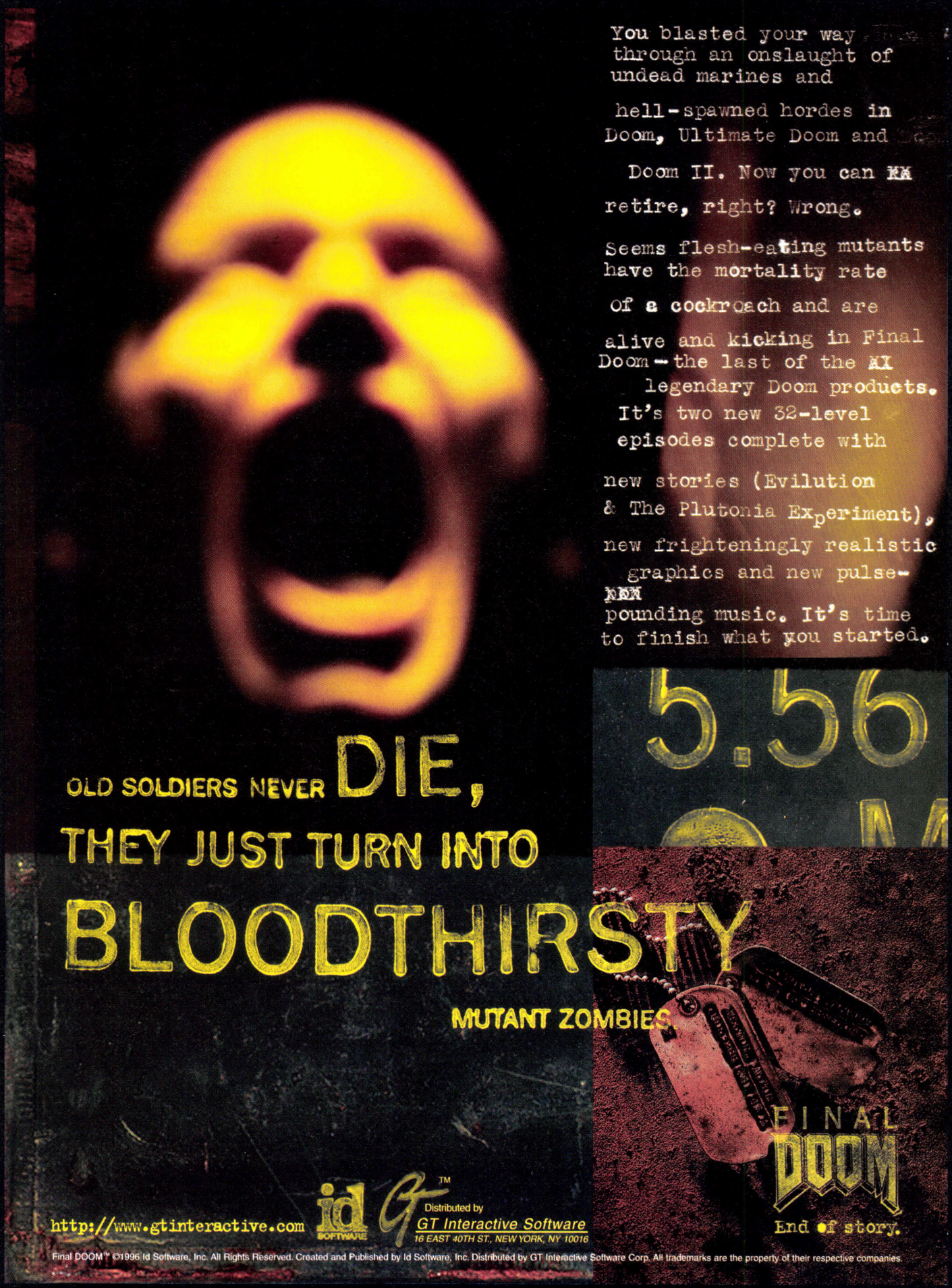
IG: What do you think Konami's biggest successes have been, and why?

Richard Rush: "I guess it matters how you define the word success. I think everything we've made we've gotten a learning experience out of it. If you want to measure success in terms of dollar volume, naturally our street pieces are our biggest dollar volume producer because they go into every type of location. It's the biggest market out there and it's the bread and butter of the company. Games like Simpsons, X-Men, Turtles and Lethal Enforcers have been some of our greatest successes.



▲ Richard Rush

I think we're also beginning to become more diversified, we're offering more in our product line for first-time market redemption pieces. We've been successful in that arena. We're offering bigger higher-end pieces like Midnight Run, WaveShark and Crypt Killer, so I think we are also successful in that arena. A lot of people keep score by how much money is out there and how much of a market share they have. We have distributors and customers who are very loyal to us, so we remain very loyal to them and if they say, 'We need another street piece developed for us' we'll go ahead and develop it for them."


You blasted your way through an onslaught of undead marines and hell-spawned hordes in Doom, Ultimate Doom and Doom II. Now you can retire, right? Wrong.
Seems flesh-eating mutants have the mortality rate of a cockroach and are alive and kicking in Final Doom - the last of the legendary Doom products. It's two new 32-level episodes complete with new stories (Evilution & The Plutonia Experiment), new frighteningly realistic graphics and new pulse-pounding music. It's time to finish what you started.
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MUTANT ZOMBIES.
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Crash Bandicoot

3-D worlds at your disposal in Crash Bandicoot

Publisher: Sony
Platform: PlayStation
Release: 4th Quarter



▲ Flash may look a little like the Tasmanian Devil but he really is no relation. Explore several 3-D worlds on a nonstop fun fest.

After coding Way of the Warrior, a surprisingly detailed and gory 3DO fighter which combined Mortal Kombat-style digitized characters with 3-D background artwork and Street Fighter II-style controls, the coding team of Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin–a.k.a Naughty Dog–came fully on board with Universal Interactive to work on a brand-new action-platform project. Legend has it that they fleshed out the early concepts for what would become Crash Bandicoot with a group of talented developers, including 20-year industry veteran David Siller (Rygar, Aero the Acrobat, Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel, Sunsoft's Warner Bros. licenses, etc.), and crossed their fingers with the hope that their game might one day become the PlayStation equivalent of Sonic the Hedgehog.



And despite the fact that the Japanese 2-D platformer Hermie Hopperhead would have been easy for Sony Computer Entertainment to heavily promote, they instead turned to Naughty Dog and Universal to secure exclusive distribution rights to the fixed 3-D action title with an almost fox-like marsupial star. Promptly thereafter, the hype engine began, as Sony's public relations people and internal developers began to buzz that Crash was king.

Realistically, however, by comparison to several of the major mascots and new lead characters to have entered the 3-D platformer realm, Sony and Universal's Bandicoot has colorful and smooth-moving visuals but is even more conservative in gameplay than any of its competitors. You run through the standard variety of scenarios (jungles, deserts, etc.) in fixed 3-D perspectives which show Crash from above ground level, giving you an opportunity to see your immediate surroundings and move around them. Unlike the daring Jumping Flash! games, you don't look through Crash's eyes, unlike Sonic, Nights and Mario 64, the world does not spin, and unlike many of today's 3-D action and platform titles, the world is restricted to linear run-throughs of predefined paths that occasionally allow you to pick routes.

Yet all of this could work to Sony's advantage if gamers are truly intimidated by the freedom to fully explore 3-D worlds, as some developers have postulated, given that Crash Bandicoot has all of the essentials of a 2-D platformer (break open boxes to collect items, run fast to avoid some enemies, bop others, use special spin attack here and there) in a pseudo 3-D universe. We'll keep our eyes on Universal's progress as the release date of Crash draws closer.

Star Gladiator

Capcom rolls out their first 3-D fighter

Publisher: Capcom
Platform: PlayStation
Release: 4th quarter

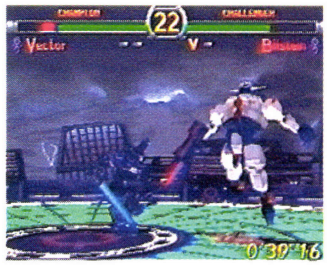




▲ Despite the weird characters, Star Gladiator is an above-average 3-D fighter.

After numerous titles built around the classic Capcom Street Fighter II engine, it is somewhat surprising to see Capcom branch out into a genre that they had avoided for so long: the 3-D fighting game. Star Gladiator is their first foray into the third dimension, and although the game is not as polished as their 2-D fighters are, it is still a fairly solid game, with some clever ideas that put a slightly new spin on the genre.

Star Gladiator resembles Namco's Soul Edge in many ways. Both games are powered by PlayStation-based arcade hardware, and both games have four action buttons that perform the same functions: vertical slash, horizontal slash, kick and defend. While Soul Edge has more polished character designs, Star Gladiator has slightly superior backgrounds, and adds a few features not found in Namco's title.



▲ Star Gladiator allows players to move in all directions, and also has moves similar to the Alpha counters found in SF Alpha.

The game features 10 characters from various parts of the galaxy. The character designs are strange at best, although there is your token "Ryu-clone" character in Hayato, a human carrying a typically large sword. All characters can perform the equivalent of a reversal in Tekken or Virtua Fighter 2 by merely pulling back and hitting defend and a slash button. This causes the character to flash, and if he or she (or it) is attacked with the same type of slash move as that used to perform the counter, the strike will be parried and instantly counterattacked. Of course, if you guess wrong on which button your opponent used to attack you, you will be hit instead. Three dimensional movement is accomplished by simply performing a roll from down to forward and pressing the guard button, allowing players to evade certain attacks by simply getting out of the way.

The final unique gameplay feature is the "plasma" meter which is used to teach the player the various combo strings in the game. As you begin a combo, the various segments of the plasma gauge will light up, indicating which buttons need to be pressed in order to continue the combo. This feature is welcome, as there are too many fighting games with esoteric moves.

Star Gladiator is currently on test in select arcades around the country, and should be available for the Sony PlayStation by the end of the year. While the game is not as polished as Tekken 2 or Soul Edge, it is still a fairly well-designed fighter, possessing enough technique to hold gamers until the next Capcom title.



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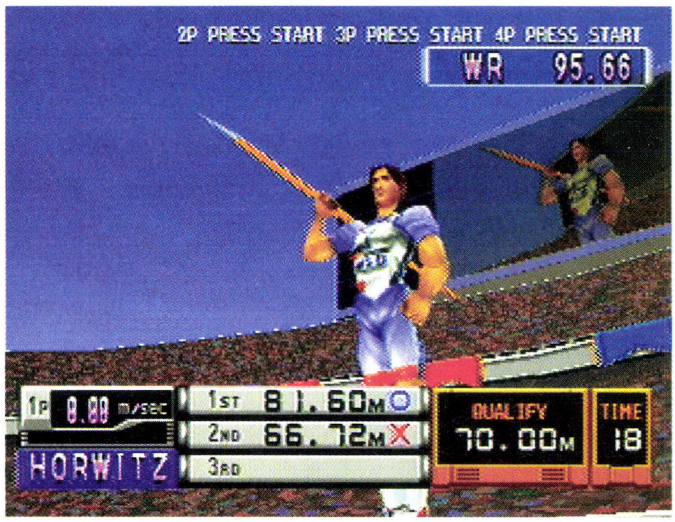
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The Javelin throw is among the most exciting events in the game, due largely to dynamic camera angles used during the event.



International Track & Field

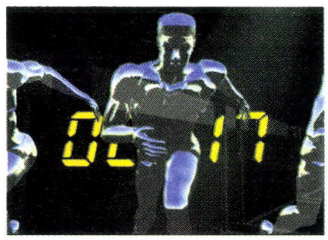
Konami takes an early lead in the 32-Bit polygonal Olympic races

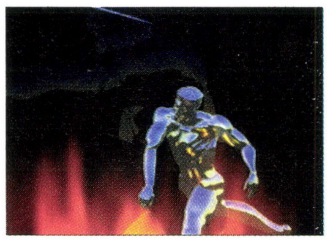
Publisher: Konami
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Konami
Release: 2nd Quarter '96

Twelve years ago, Konami's Track & Field appeared in arcades and later on home consoles, with the more exotic Hyper Sports following in arcades and Track & Field 2 appearing on the NES. The concept was simple: You smashed on a couple of buttons in a given rhythm to give your player extra leg or arm power, and generally speaking, whoever came closest to damaging the buttons would win the event. A special peripheral was even released for use with a home translation of Track & Field—a joystick-less plastic box with two arcade-style buttons to slam on and damage to the players' content.

With the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta just around the corner, Konami began to tease the Japanese press several months ago with video footage of a title developed by Konami Computer Entertainment in Tokyo and intended for release in PlayStation-compatible arcade and home formats. To say the least, the game looked beautiful on tape: Cutting quickly from event to event, Konami's designers appeared ready to unleash motion-captured athletes in all sorts of games which looked as close to real life as has ever been attempted.

Shortly after announcing that the American title of the game was to be International Track & Field—hopefully inspiring nostalgia in older gamers such as ourselves—Konami shocked us by having the game in the mail and ready for review. While we certainly have mixed feelings about one specific part of IT&F's design, there's no doubt that Konami has delivered beyond even our great expectations with the rest of the package.





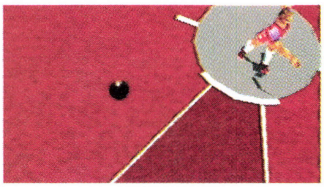
A rendered cinematic opening would probably never lead the average person to believe that there were going to be even more impressive graphics beyond this point. Thankfully, Konami saved their best visuals for the actual game itself.

Once you've entered your name, selected your country and chosen your event from a list of 11 possible sports, IT&F begins to show its arcade heritage with both solid, glitch-free polygonal graphics and the sorts of camera angles that only arcade programmers seem to be able to pull off. Every event begins with sweeping camera movements that carry the viewer from a huge television scoreboard on one end of the Olympic arena to the specific site of the sport itself, and as a result of some very competent 3-D programming, none of the objects pop in and out as the camera moves around. Events end with televised replays which switch between multiple impressive dynamic camera views and show winners posing for the crowd in Street Fighter victory style.

The appropriate use of dynamic cameras and other 32-Bit graphics technology make IT&F noteworthy.

All of the aforementioned features are enough to give International Track & Field distinctive character, but it's the appropriate use of dynamic cameras and other 32-Bit graphics technologies during the game that make the title especially noteworthy. Hypothetically speaking, if Konami had, say, given you the pole vault event and just had the camera hover in a fixed position that showed your character running closer and closer to the screen before vaulting over the bar, this could have been a very boring event to watch. Instead, they begin by showing your character from the rear, moving the camera outward to show the track as he begins to run with the pole, and closing in on the bar as the character comes up to vault over it. Based on the camera action in these events and the other nine stellar ones, Konami is real close already to winning *IG's* award for best realtime cinematography ever in a video game.

Beyond the camera movements, Konami also achieved spectacular results with the PlayStation's 3-D geometry and texture-mapping hardware. The

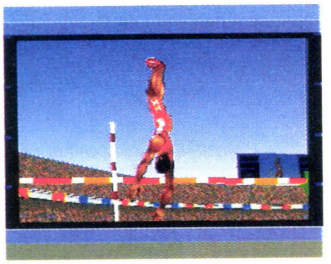


The camera spins as your on-screen character rotates around to pitch a shot put into the air. After three attempts, a replay is shown of your character's best throw.

The Bottom Line

Konami's 1996 update of their classic Track & Field title offers exceptionally improved graphics and sounds, but fails to improve on the aged button-smashing gameplay of the original. Best for multiplayer gaming, International Track & Field is a perfect title if you can simply ignore glaring control issues. Recommended for fans of 3-D graphics and Olympic sports junkies.

100-meter freestyle swimming event comes as close to reality as we could hope for with the PlayStation, including a full indoor pool complex complete with undulating transparent water, motion-captured swimming animations and entirely polygonal characters. Except in the most nitpicky ways—such as the slightly visible lack of rubbery smoothness in the big blue cushions and the lack of dust clouds at players' feet—International Track and Field could not have taken a bigger step forward visually than it did.



▲ The cinema replays that accompany each event are truly a sight to see, and really show off the visual power of the PlayStation with each new angle.

We cannot stand the idea that we'll destroy our controllers and hands simply to play the game.

Audio is generally reasonable, but not tremendous. Crowd noise is great, and what voices are there are very nicely done—during a failed discus throw attempt, the character actually yelled "ouch!" as we built up his momentum and forgot to hit the Throw Button. There's little music, and it's not the best we've heard, but it's Konami's standard funky arcade style.

But, as mentioned earlier in this review, there's a single aspect of the game's design that hasn't come far enough in the last 10 years: We're not masochists, and we frankly cannot stand the idea that we need to both destroy our PlayStation controllers and develop carpal tunnel syndrome simply to get a world record in javelin throwing. Button-slamming gameplay appeared to have died a long-deserved death when walk-and-punch games such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles went out of style and precise-controlling fighters such as Street Fighter II became the rage, and that unfortunate control mechanism is at the very heart of International Track & Field's action. You have to viciously slam two different "power/run" buttons and tap a third or fourth "throw/action" button to win in any of the events, wearing both yourself and the controller out in the process. Compounding the problem is the fact that Sony's controllers are shaped in such a manner that you simply cannot lay them down flat. There were good reasons, after all, that a special disposable peripheral was released for that home Track & Field translation many years ago, and a reason that it's very difficult to find Track and Field arcade machines today in working condition.

On the other hand, we are sadists, and there's definitely something to be said for the game's appeal when you play it simultaneously with a friend or three—IT&F does support the Sony multitap peripheral, offering several simultaneous events and the rest alternating between active human characters. It's good for a lot of laughs and fun times. In our view, if Konami could have made the control scheme a bit more advanced, they would have easily produced the best all-around sports game released to date, but as it stands, International Track & Field is only the most visually impressive. IG

http://www.konami.com/track.htm

GRAPHICS: A
+ Fully rendered motion-captured characters provide a great sense of realism.
+ The in-game graphics nearly match those in the intro—quite a feat.

SOUNDS: B
+/- Not a lot of music, but what is there is enjoyable.
+ Sound effects are great and sound as if you were actually at the Olympic Games.

GAMEPLAY: C
+ Many events and options...
- ...but the control is infinitely difficult to get accustomed to, due to the PlayStation controller's awkward shape and the need to constantly tap the buttons.

LASTING POWER: B-
+ Like any good multiplayer sports title, IT&F will provide many hours of play, that is, if you have multiple players...
+ There's always the desire to break previous records, which will keep you coming back.

OVERALL:



Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED"

On Your Marks...



Javelin: The player presses the two Power Buttons to build up running momentum and begins holding the Throw Button to adjust the angle where the javelin will be released. Letting go of the Throw Button releases the javelin.



Discus: Standing inside a cage, the character spins as the Power Buttons are pressed, releasing the discus when the Throw Button is hit. The trick is to release the discus in the right direction, instead of smashing it into the cage.



100-Meter Dash: Rhythmically smashing the Run 1 and Run 2 Power Buttons will cause your character to run quickly and keep ahead of the other three on-screen runners.



High Jump: Pressing the Run Power Buttons helps your character run over to a large pole elevated in front of a large blue cushion. Pressing the Jump Button at the right moment carries the character over the pole.



Triple Jump: In this event, the Power Buttons are used to run toward the white line and jump three times: The first two jumps are short hops to carry you to another line, and the third jump is a long jump into a sand pit.



Shot Put: The Power Buttons build strength in the on-screen athlete, and pressing the Throw Button releases the ball into the air, hopefully without having it go too far to the left or right of the defined area.



Hammer Throw: Your character is inside a cage, this time holding the handle of a large tethered ball. As the Power Buttons are pressed, your character spins around until you use the Throw Button to release the hammer.



Long Jump: After smashing the Run Power Buttons to carry you close to a sand pit, you press and hold the Jump Button at a white line to launch your character into the air, adjusting his trajectory until you release the button.



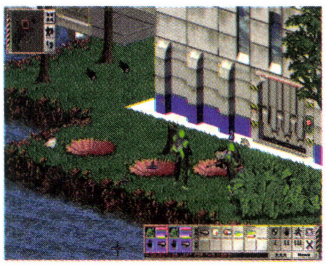
Pole Vault: The Run Buttons bring your character to the elevated pole. When you get up to the pole, you press the Jump Button to use the pole to carry yourself into the air. Releasing the Jump Button lets you let go of the pole.



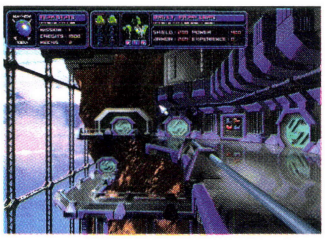
110-Meter Hurdles: Pressing the Power Buttons to run at top speed, you hit the jump button each time you come close to a hurdle gate in an attempt to beat your three opponents to the finish line.



100-Meter Free Style: Pressing the Power Buttons to swim as quickly as possible, you make one fast lap across the pool, use a button to turn around at the pool's end, and come back for a second lap.



▶ The outdoor levels feature lush vegetation, a sharp contrast with the interior design of the enemy buildings.



Total Mayhem

Eidos clones Origin's Crusader: No Remorse but forgets to implement a key feature: a usable interface

Publisher: Eidos Interactive
Platform: Windows 95
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Cinematix
Release: Now

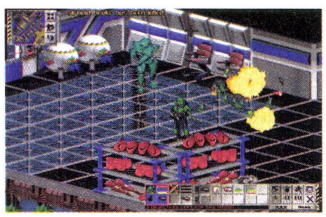
As the newly formed conglomerate of Domark Software and U.S. Gold, Eidos Interactive gets itself started on shaky ground with Total Mayhem. The company does have a number of good ideas which unfortunately go to waste, thanks to poor implementation and an abysmal interface.

Total Mayhem's story is as hackneyed as they come: Earth's vast arrays of war machines have once again gone awry and turned against their organic masters. In typically bitter sci-fi irony, humanity is now enslaved. Players lead a small pocket of resistance on the planet Caetnor, fuelled by the Mayhem soldier, a cyborg developed from stolen Mech technology, and, of course, it's humanity's only hope. Players must seek and destroy all of Caetnor's computer cores in order to achieve freedom for the planet.

Considering how overused and unoriginal the story is, finding isometric gameplay similar to Crusader: No Remorse is a bit of a surprise. Crusader, with roughly 200,000 copies sold to date, remains a surprise action hit, especially considering the deep-seated first-person trend action games have had lately. Total Mayhem's missions are both indoors and outdoors, a drastic change from Crusader's expansive interior design. Players also can control up to six Mayhem soldiers simultaneously, travelling in a squad or individually, similar to Bullfrog's cyberpunk action/strategy game,



▲ Level design is on the simplistic side, with the enemy bases very sparsely furnished. In addition, the edges of each level simply drop off into blackness, which makes the game look rather unpolished.



▲ Total Mayhem borrows heavily from Crusader, from the isometric viewpoint to the many destroyable objects in the levels. Unfortunately, the similarities end there.



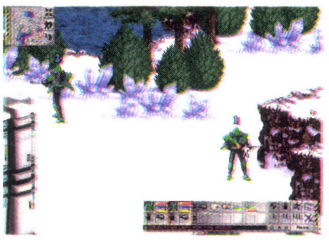
▶ Rendered cinematics provide a welcome change from the drab in-game graphics. Of course, is it worth playing just to see the next cutscene?

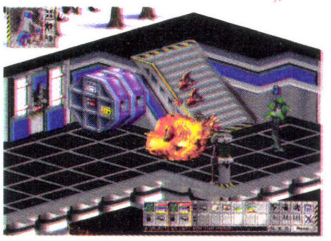
Total Mayhem's story is as hackneyed as they come: Earth's war machines have once again gone awry.

The Bottom Line

Blending a handful of good ideas with an abysmal interface and lackluster aesthetics, Total Mayhem is a title best left on the shelf.

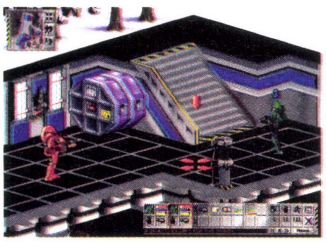
Syndicate. Both of these strides are thwarted, however, by Total Mayhem's interface, as well as uninteresting mission objectives and mission procedures. Players navigate the resistance HQ using clickable images a la the Wing Commander games. Here, players can upgrade weapons and armor, save their game and get mission briefings. Total Mayhem's not too high on customizability, giving players access to a mere five weapons and a handful of auxiliary items—a minuscule number of each for a game centered on destruction. Considering how much attention is paid to providing the outdoor scenery with flora, the almost total lack of machinery within the game's structures is shocking, not to mention the complete lack of functionality of what is there.



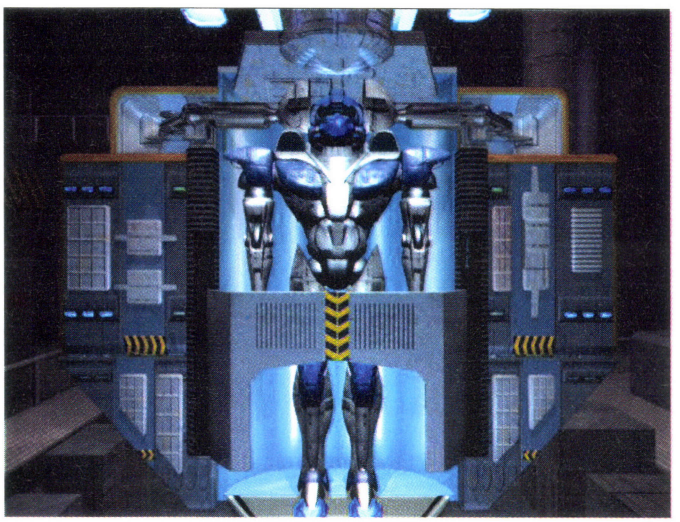


▲ Total Mayhem allows you to control an entire squad of Mayhem soldiers, who will generally follow your commands to the point where they will blindly wander into enemy fire or get stuck next to an object until the player intervenes.

Whereas most of Crusader's missions involved negotiating traps, Total Mayhem relies entirely on a handful of enemies per mission as the sole resistance. Anything else in the game is simply there to explode when shot.



▲ While there are lots of things to destroy, there is a curious lack of things to destroy them with, as there are only five different weapons in the entire game.

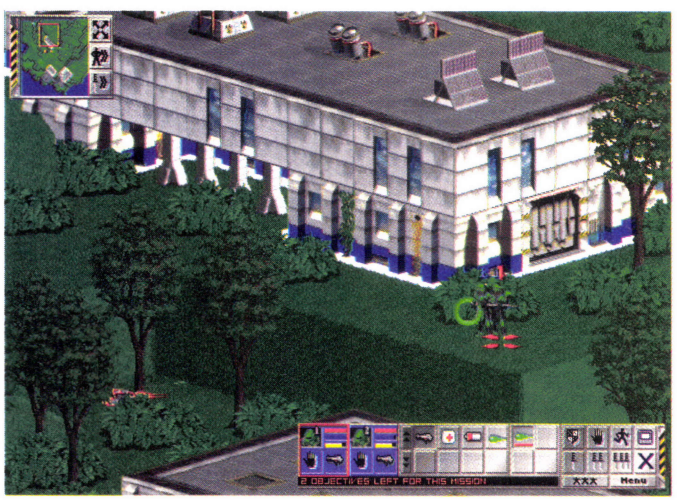


▲ Total Mayhem is typical of the genre in every way, right down to the character designs. The player controls a squad of these big, ugly cyborgs, which bear more than a passing resemblance to the body armor worn by the protagonist in Crusader: No Remorse.





▲ Even on different levels, the in-game graphics are drab and suffer from a perpetual sameness. Maybe if everything wasn't grey...



▲ The obvious disadvantage to an isometric perspective is the fact that walls and objects will occasionally obscure your view. Alas, Total Mayhem is still afflicted with this problem, meaning that your progress often will be impeded by a partially hidden door or enemy.

In addition to the lack of game variety, Total Mayhem's level design could be much cleaner, as well. Buildings often obscure tunnels and other paths to advancement, and a number of walls and ceilings do not seem to cut away properly, making navigating Total Mayhem's levels a virtual guessing game. One minor problem is that each map ends abruptly with nothing more than a black void as a barrier, an eyesore easily gotten around.

Aesthetically, Total Mayhem is a mixed bag, although leaning in the bad direction. The rendered graphics lack detail; all animated characters are sparsely textured and animated, and all seems to show what look like compression artifacts. Ever-prevalent explosions are choppily animated, and only come in one ugly yellow-orange color. Total Mayhem brags about its multiple levels of zoom-in, but the close-up view is entirely useless, considering most enemies attack from afar, and being closer to attacking enemies gives no advantage in combat.

Total Mayhem's CD-based dance/techno music provides a more-than-adequate beat for the less-than-adequate action, and by itself is pleasing to the ears. The sound effects are of a lesser ilk, unfortunately—not only lacking in use, but also lacking in quality, the effects are best ignored or turned off. Total Mayhem's mouse-driven interface may be easier to pick up than Crusader's keyboard scheme, but in the long run, is what tears this game apart. Players simply click where they want to send their team, and under ideal conditions, they walk there.

Unfortunately, ideal conditions mean no obstacles, no enemy fire and no more than one soldier in the player's squad. Soldiers wander about trying to find their way from point A to point B, or just become snagged on a fern and stop, waiting for the player to assume control of him alone and guide him individually. Inventory management is equally tedious, as well as time-consuming. Considering how short each mission is in the first place, every moment spent wrestling with the interface is a point against Total Mayhem. IG

Every moment spent wrestling with the mouse-driven interface is a point against Total Mayhem.

http://www.domark.com/mayhem/totalmayem.html

GRAPHICS : C+
+ Some cool Mech designs.
- Little-to-no graphic variety.
- Lacking animation.

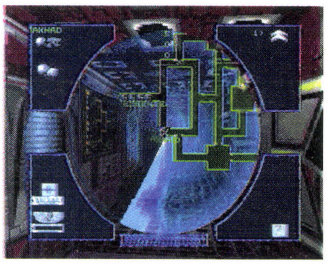
SOUND : B
+ Good dance/techno soundtrack...
- Only six music tracks.
- Horrid sound effects.

GAMEPLAY : D
+ Plenty of good ideas, such as outdoor environments and upgradable weapons.
- Bad mouse-driven interface and poor level design.

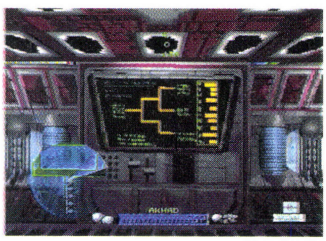
LASTING POWER : D
- Twenty excruciatingly short missions.

OVERALL :

Intelligent Gamer "BELOW AVERAGE"



The map will be a familiar sight to players, as it is essential when trying to keep tabs on both your team and the hordes of hungry Genestealers.



Space Hulk: Vengeance of the Blood Angels

EA publishes a first-person title that relies as much on strategy as it does reflexes

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Platform: Windows 95

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Key Game

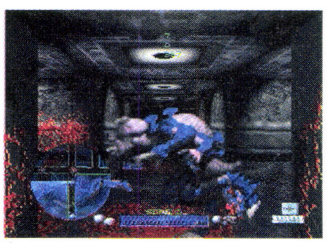
Release: July 1996

If you have ever doubted that there could be such a game classified as a "thinking man's" Doom or think that it is an oxymoron, Space Hulk will make you a true believer. This sequel of the popular PC game that appeared on shelves years ago may contain an entirely revamped game engine, but it still continues the legacy of requiring players to think before they shoot.

Space Hulk places you in command of a prestigious company of Space Marines named "Terminators." Not to be confused with the robots that are afflicted with a mutated Austrian accent, Terminators is the term given to a special elite group of Marines. These warriors enjoy a few benefits other than a generous 401K plan—they are honored by being allowed to use a strong suit of body armor that entirely encases their body in addition to also being armed to the teeth with an array of weapons. The particular company that you are a part of is named the "Blood Angels."



Unfortunately for this hapless Terminator, the standard issue armor doesn't offer much protection from the sharp teeth and claws of a ferocious Genestealer. Hope you remembered to equip some close-range weapons...



The weak point in Space Hulk's armor is its 3-D engine, which is not even as advanced as the aging pseudo-3-D Doom engine.

Space Hulk 2 continues the legacy of requiring players to think before they shoot.

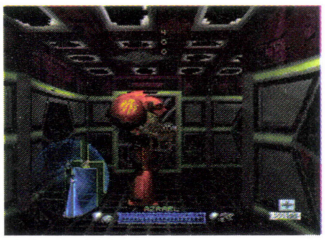
The armored suits were created to protect against most forms of human attack, but unfortunately not alien. As a result, the Genestealers, aliens which look like a cross between a reptile and an inhabitant of LV-426, just happens to be a Terminator's worst nightmare. It just hadn't occurred to the military engineer that his protective suits would have to withstand strong claws and teeth instead of just laser blasts.

With the exception of a few missions in which you are given orders, your goal in Space Hulk is to successfully command a team of several Marines inside a large number of "Hulks" to complete missions. Hulks are disabled, archaic spaceships which have been taken over by Genestealers, and other menaces, whom have taken the liberty to turn these ships into their own infested hives. Once aboard each Hulk, the group of Terminators is briefed on a set of mission objectives that must be completed. These objectives generally lead to an overall goal, which is somewhat described by the mission name. For example, some of the mission names are Escort, Purify, Suicide and Purge. Escort demands that you protect fellow Terminators as they rumble across a Hulk, while Purge instructs you to obliterate many key areas of a Hulk, along with its unfriendly tenants. More complex missions may have you complete a combination of things such as finding an object while also "Purifying" a certain room of a Hulk. The completion of the missions is not elementary, however. Careful planning along with a handsome amount of trial and error is needed to successfully complete most of the missions. Quick hand-eye coordination is welcome, but not necessarily needed. Although the game utilizes a Doom-like, first-person interface that allows you to move about the halls and rooms of the Hulk, most of the real action requires quick, cerebral reactions. Instead of

The Bottom Line

While this sort of game certainly doesn't appeal to everyone, Electronic Arts has succeeded in producing a wonderfully horrific mix of strategy and action in dramatic fashion.

mindlessly blasting your way through a situation, areas must be meticulously secured through various tactics. For example, to get through a hallway which runs next to a junction that happens to have a unstoppable nest of Genestealer activity, the firepower of one Terminator firing from one position may not be adequate. Instead, the solution might be to position Terminators in several keys areas within hallways which enable them to provide support and suppression fire. If the fields of fire are accurate and adequate, they should safely mow down hordes of Genestealers as the other Terminators travel across the hallway. Once that is done, the Terminators providing cover fire must be given orders to



▲ A team of marines are under your command, requiring players to issue commands to the soldiers not under their immediate control.

retreat in a manner that will keep them from getting killed as they follow their comrades whom they just helped.

Many of these situations may come up in any given mission, and you may not have forever to think about them. In fact, you may only have a few seconds. Space Hulk, for the most part, is a realtime game.



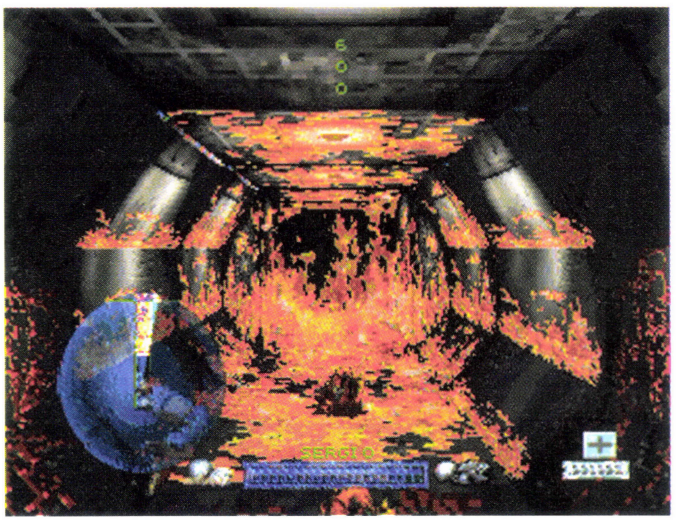
▲ Fortunately, your marines are not totally hapless at hand-to-hand combat. Here, a Genestealer is shocked by the sudden turn of events.

Everything is constantly moving, and even more importantly, sometimes it continues to move while you are plotting your next strategy. During gameplay, the need will often arise that you will have to check your map, and plot the strategies for you and your comrades during the mission. The game allots a certain amount of "freeze time" that allows you to plot your



▲ One particularly nifty graphical effect is the vibration effect seen whenever you get a little too friendly with a Genestealer.

strategy and give orders without having the worry that things will happen without you being able to see them. If you take too long, however, the time runs out, and you run the risk of being devoured by a Genestealer without having seen his jaws. There is a wealth of various orders and commands you can give your soldiers. Menial commands such as "advance," "retreat," "pick-up" and "drop" are available, in addition to more complex ones such as "overwatch," "cover fire in a direction," "search area" and "follow." Multiple commands can



▲ Ahh, I love the smell of napalm in the morning. Once again, the Terminators bring peace through superior firepower.

be given to each Terminator at any time. If the orders are not executed to your satisfaction, you can personally control the Terminator, instantly transferring you his first-person view. Extra weapons such as Power Swords, Chain Fists, Lightning Claws Grenade Launchers and Flame Throwers can be used in combat whether they are assigned, or found during a mission. Although Space Hulk doesn't use a flashy, technically impressive game engine, it doesn't really need to. The 3-D engine could be considered a step down from Doom, but honestly, a tremendous array of movement isn't needed for this type of strategic game. The graphics on the other hand, are somewhat impressive. In-game graphics consist of 3-D environments that expertly convey dark, moody surroundings, with prerendered, 3-D creatures inhabiting them. Genestealers are quite menacing, as are some of the other enemies such as Hybrids, Magus and Patriarchs. Even better, when your enemies are disposed of, their carcasses are usually splattered amongst the walls and floors. Past battles are often marked by heavily blood-stained walls and floors littered with the limbs of Genestealers and crushed remains of Terminator armor. While the digitized sounds won't be labeled as outstanding or revolutionary, they do the job quite well. The panicked screams of your Terminators during battle coupled with eerie sound effects, creates a feeling not unlike that of an Alien movie. There are some tidbits of music here and there, but the main, audible background consists of a chaotic chorus comprised of gunfire, startled soldiers and occasional, nervous chatter.



▲ Teamwork is essential if you want the marines under your command to come out of the Space Hulk's airlock intact.

When you consider the difficulty of this game, and the vast amount of missions available, one of the most welcome surprises is the wealth of multiplay options. Network, modem, IPX, and TCP connections are all available to allow gamers to play a variety of multiplayer Space Hulk games. Up to 10 people can play at once on a network or over the Internet, allowing the participants to either work together to complete a mission or to engage in a classic Deathmatch.

Although Space Hulk doesn't use a flashy, technically impressive game engine, it doesn't really need to.

Space Hulk is a title that won't appeal to everyone. If you are looking for an easy game, or a mindless one, this game certainly isn't for you. However, if you are willing to learn a strategic game with a healthy portion of action in it, Space Hulk couldn't be a more perfect fit. IG



▲ Note the lack of pixelization on the enemies, which are animated at varying ranges, rather than simply scaled forward.

http://www.ea.com/

GRAPHICS : B

+ Great visuals that successfully portray a futuristic, gothic feel.
- 3-D engine is a step down from Doom, while other games are trying to top it.

SOUNDS: B

+ Excellent sound effects and digitized speech help contribute to the foreboding atmosphere.

GAMEPLAY: A

+ This game is an excellent blend of strategy and action.

LASTING POWER: A

+ This game is very challenging, and will take a long time to complete—squeamish need not apply.
+ Multiplayer network options breathe even more life into the game.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED" B+



Scenes like this one really showcase Jumping Flash! 2's gorgeous graphics. Textures have been greatly improved, and there are numerous visual special effects throughout the game.

Jumping Flash! 2

Robbit returns to action in Sony's beautiful-looking new platformer

Publisher: Sony CE

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Exact

Release: Now (Japan)

One of the warmest welcomes from the media last year was given to Sony Computer Entertainment's first 3-D platformer, Jumping Flash!. Not knowing quite what to expect from the newly founded software company, the same audience that had been weaned on Super Mario Bros. looked forward to experiencing a platform game on the PlayStation that had been given the three-dimensional treatment of realtime polygons. Soon after, those same realtime polygons would become the system's claim to fame.

Like some of the other launch titles, though, Jumping Flash! was victimized by the media in that it was impossible for this fabulous new experience to live up to the hype that was created prior to the game's release. Nonetheless, its inclusion on the sampler disc and endless rantings by some of the same people who panned phenomenal games like Yoshi's Island insured the game's quick success as one of the first-generation titles on the new platform.





The main driving force of the original Jumping Flash! was undoubtedly the game's amazing graphics, and the trend continues in the sequel. JF!2 has some of the best looking visuals in a PS game to date, with heavy use of transparencies and a broad range of colors.

Only a year later, the sequel lacks one of the key factors that pushed the original game to such heightened popularity—novelty. Striking somewhere between Sonic the Hedgehog and Doom, Jumping Flash! was the world's first platform game to use the first-person perspective. For some, this novelty grew old before even completing the first adventure, but for those wanting more still, Sony was happy to accommodate.

As sequels tend to be, Jumping Flash! 2 is a carbon copy of the original game in terms of theme, concept and play mechanics. Other than a hardly useful jumping gauge found on the player's right-hand side, the game could easily be mistaken for nothing more than the later stages in the first game.

As in the original, the player controls a small mechanical rabbit named Robbit through a series of three-dimensional environments in a type of fantasy treasure hunt to collect special items and then hop to the exit launchpad to move on to the next level. This time around, rather than gathering giant carrot jetpods (Jumping Flash! 1), Robbit must instead free small imprisoned aliens known as "Muu Muus."

Muu Muus are small, cute, white Smurf-like creatures that stand about Robbit's height and repeatedly produce a sound something like "muh-MOO." Unlike the

Jumping Flash! 2 is a carbon copy of the original in terms of theme, concept and play mechanics.



Baron Aloha, the villain from the original Jumping Flash! returns, but this time he's not trying to kill you—he's asking for your help. The evil Captain Suzuki has imprisoned Aloha's cohorts, the Muu-Muus, and it's now your job to free them.

The Bottom Line

The sequel to Jumping Flash! makes a graphical leap from the original game without altering gameplay enough to lose the small captured audience nor to become more attractive to those who had skipped over the first one. As such, Jumping Flash! 2 is highly recommended to fans of its prequel and moderately recommended to fans of platform games in general.

jetpods, this sound effect makes the creatures a little easier to find than they might have otherwise been, effectively making one harder to miss when they might be standing directly behind Robbit in a more obscure location.

To most U.S. gamers, Muu Muus may sound like a new addition to the Jumping Flash! mythology, but in fact the Muu Muus were actually Baron Aloha's minions throughout the first game. Showing up only in small cinematic sequences of the European and Japanese releases, the Muu Muus played a minor role in the story of the first adventure—mainly, they sat around a bar getting drunk as they complained about being defeated by a mechanical rabbit.



▲ The Time Stop power-up freezes time for a few seconds, allowing you to freely roam about the world with no distractions. If only we could get one for deadline...

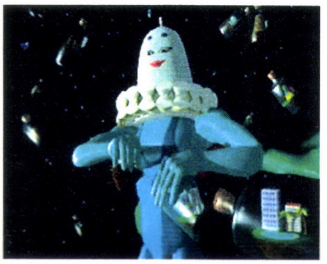
This otherwise minor difference between the two versions of Jumping Flash! goes easily enough unnoticed until a reviewer is made painfully aware of the U.S. version's omission by the inclusion of the original Jumping Flash!, complete with English language and full cinemas, with the Japanese packaged Jumping Flash! 2. Combined, the two games still retail for the same



▲ In addition to the regular overworld scenes, there are some indoor stages, not to mention some nice underwater areas.

price as a typical PlayStation game (5,800 yen or about $60), making the package an exceptional value for import gamers who still try to maintain a budget.

Without this incentive, though, a player must question the value of the new game because like the first one, JF!2 contains only six small levels that are easily defeated by even the most modest of gamers in only a few hours time. Each stage contains only two small levels of the previously described scavenger hunts and one Boss stage. After the sixth Boss is defeated, the player is told that the game isn't really over yet and so to see the real ending, the player has to dash through the 'Extra' levels (which have all-new bonus levels) with a little bit of time removed from the clock on each.



▲ The evil Captain Suzuki is out to take over all the planets of the Galaxy. Looks a lot like the giant maid in *Spaceballs*, no?

The title's greatest weakness is probably both in the brevity of the adventure and in its lack of challenge. Bosses are probably where the greatest amount of criticism could be placed, since each one is unimpressive and is easily taken out by pouncing on them steadily while simultaneously firing Robbit's standard weapon and quickly unloading the three stored special weapons.

It is disappointing to see that this aspect of the game has not been corrected in the sequel as it stands as such a stark contrast to the depth of exploration found in the normal levels. This contrast becomes quite pronounced in JF!2, wherein the design of the levels has become even more intricate. In addition to the fans that appeared before, there are also turbine engines and cannons that launch Robbit to fantastic new heights. As one looks down between Robbit's giant feet from atop any of these such heights, the strengths of the sequel really show in the textures of the objects and the more detailed and colorful graphics below. The player is not as confused by the warping effect of the textures that often plagued players of the original with distraction and headaches. Realism is stretched even further by the use of fogging effects to quietly conceal late draw-in.

These graphical enhancements underlie the backbone of improvements in Jumping Flash!2. Nearly every object or concept created for the first game appears in the sequel but in flashier form. The roller coaster that Robbit could ride to reach different parts of a level in the old game is present in the new game too, but this time waterslides and rainbows accompany the coaster tracks, which are lined with colored lights and give a more realistic sense of motion reminiscent of the racing game Wipeout.



▲ Once again, expect to feel your stomach turn as you experience the frighteningly realistic motion of flight in JF!2. The new jump meter helps you set up better jumps.

Even the details one would so often take for granted were enhanced. The sky is more rich and flowing, the shadows are more realistically placed and the ground textures seem less repetitive. In every way, the small island levels are packed with the graphic intensity that make it one of the most beautiful games yet to offer a three-dimensional playfield.

Nearly every object or concept created for the first game appears in the sequel but in flashier form.

If the effortless snow and rain aren't convincing enough, one special effect seems to never get old. Again like the first game, small mazes appear here and there throughout the levels where players can explore but this time the mazes are found underwater. As breathtaking as in the movie *The Abyss*, this one effect is easily the most incredible experience in the entire game.

Less impressive, but equally well placed is the game's music. Most of the time, the music is a slight variation of that found in the first, if only a bit more Japanese, but the fourth level's stormy skied industrial environment incorporates one of the coolest tunes ever found in a video game.

Overall, it's difficult to criticize what, in the end, stands as such a great work of art, but in too many ways, Jumping Flash! 2 exemplifies what many gamers have been screaming about for the past year. It's a beautiful game, but beneath the skin, the lack of depth in play mechanics and interactivity combined with short levels and a decided lack of challenge yield a game that quickly loses its replay value within only a few short days. IG

http://www.scea.sony.com/SCEA/index.html

GRAPHICS: A
+ Some of the best three-dimensional graphics to date.
+ Special effects like fog, snow and rain make them even more impressive.

SOUNDS: A-
+ Standard Japanese fare, much like the music in the first Jumping Flash!.
+ Sound effects are adequate and never very annoying...
- ...but they don't add much to the game either.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ The first-person perspective makes hopping from platform to platform easy.
+ The stages are laid out better this time...
- ...but still aren't any larger.

LASTING POWER: B-
+ The graphics and atmosphere make the game worth exploring fully.
- This process of exploration won't take too long, though, and no two-player options are included.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED" B+



Zooming out to the farthest angle facilitates a good playable overview of the game while the tightest zoom is just as playable and shows off the impressive animation as well.

Victory Goal '96

Sega's V'Goal '96 redefines the meaning of realistic gameplay and graphics

Publisher: Sega

Platform: Saturn

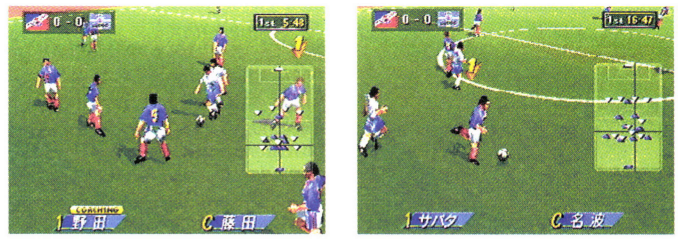
Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Sega

Release: Now (Japan)

Recently, there have been a handful of games that have really tapped into the true processing power of the Sega Saturn. Games like Panzer Dragoon II, Virtua Fighter 2 and Sega Rally have blown away game enthusiasts with their impressive graphics and smooth animation, as well as their great gameplay. What the Saturn now needs is a continual stream of titles like these to put it over the top. Consider Victory Goal '96 a worthy addition to the arsenal.

It's a fact that soccer games are not on the "A-list" of games to have in America; soccer trails behind baseball, basketball and football in popularity, despite the fact that soccer is wildly popular in just about every other locale in the world. Well, if a gamer is even mildly interested in purchasing a soccer game to call their own, this Japanese import is a must-have.



The artificial intelligence in V'Goal has players on both sides of the ball going toward the action at all times. V'Goal's predecessor had problems with characters staying too stationary while things heated up around them.

The opening cinematic sequence features scenes of individual players performing various tricks and field maneuvers, all composed of high-quality CG imagery, which are so lifelike that a double take may be in order. Normally opening sequences aren't worth mentioning, but the quality of this one is certainly indicative of the level of polish throughout this title.



It is evident that the Sega programmers used motion-capture technology to produce the outstanding opening sequences, not to mention tedious attention to detail.

V'Goal is certainly not plagued by a lack of options, as there are six different modes of play to keep things interesting. Players can select either J-League for a complete selection of licensed Japanese teams, or Superstar League to play as a dream team composed of the best players of the league.

Tournament selection lets the player arrange match-ups between any of the teams in the J-League. Among the other selections available are an Exhibition Mode and a penalty kick shoot-out option. Similar to a home run derby, it's there for a quick fix if an entire game is a little too daunting.

What the Saturn now needs is a continual stream of titles like these to put it over the top.

Three stadiums are available but they seem to have little bearing on gameplay. Players can also set weather conditions for each of the stadiums, as well as day/night play.

Sound is also impressive, with realistic stadium noise, as well as running commentary from a Japanese announcer. Music is available, and both the announcer and background music can be toggled on or off at will.

Six camera angles provide just about every possible view one could ask for. Automatic zooming works well and does not hinder

The Bottom Line

With the addition of V'Goal '96 (soon to be Worldwide Soccer II when it's released in the U.S.) to the Sega library of games, it's becoming more and more obvious that the Saturn is climbing out of the hole it found itself in not more than a year ago. V'Goal 96 takes full advantage of the Saturn's processing power not only graphically but also in improved AI. Highly recommended for fans of the sport of soccer, and for anyone who enjoys a fun, easy multiplayer sports contest.

gameplay in any way. In fact, the higher the magnification, the more impressive this game looks. Even in the tightest view, characters look sharp and natural in all their actions. This brings us to player animation, which is probably the most impressive thing in the game; the players look extremely lifelike and animate fluidly. A variety of movements can be performed as well, including skid steals, headers, tripping, footwork and sprinting, all



▲ The radar formation screen on the right side comes in handy in determining the location of off-screen players.

There is no easy way to win against the computer. Most games have soft spots or patterns...not so with Victory Goal '96.



▲ While some game enthusiasts may think V'Goal is plagued by options, game fans will appreciate having the ability to tailor the game to their liking.

of which look very realistic, suggesting that Sega used motion capture in the design of this game. Many other elements in the game have been treated with the same perfectionism, including the overall difficulty. There is no easy way to win against the computer. Most games have soft spots or patterns that, once the player learns them, allows the player to continually



▲ As opening sequences go, V'Goal has a lengthy amount of scenes including this one of a header shot sneaking past the goalie.

score and dominate his opponents. Not so with Victory Goal '96, as the computer AI is very smart, and defense plays a major factor in each game—most of the games we played at the office ended in either penalty shoot-outs (double overtime) or very low-scoring contests (usually 1-0 or 2-1). At the same time, there is room for those interested in a more arcade-like experience. Turn off penalties, turn on injuries and go head-to-head with a friend, sliding into and tripping your opponent as much as you like without fear of getting called for foul play.

As it stands today, Sega will release this title in the U.S. as Worldwide Soccer II sometime over the course of the next six months. Japanese teams will be replaced with a variety of international teams, and naturally, any and all text or voice will be in English. If all general aspects of the game stand as is, it will be well worth the long wait. IG

http://www.sega.com/

GRAPHICS: A
+ Very impressive polygonal characters redefine the term realism in a sports sim.

SOUNDS: B
+/- Not a huge variety of in-game music but commentary and on-field noises were more than adequate.

GAMEPLAY: A
+ The second most impressive element of the game. Player control was almost flawless. Mastering player maneuvers adds greatly to intensity.

LASTING POWER: A
+/- As with all sports games, longevity comes down to the interest of the player. V-Goal will keep soccer fans occupied for quite a while.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer "HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"

Worldwide Soccer vs. Victory Goal '96

The improvements Sega has made over the original Worldwide Soccer are impressive enough that we decided to do a head-to-head comparison of the two to showcase the differences between the games. One of the main differences is in the graphics engines, as WWS used prerendered sprites while V'Goal uses polygonal imaging for a more realistic look and feel. V'Goal is currently available in Japan, and will arrive in the U.S. as Worldwide Soccer II sometime in late 1996.

Worldwide Soccer vs. Victory Goal '96



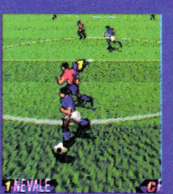
Opening cinematic sequences are at least 30 percent better. While WWS's opening sequences are nothing to scoff at, they don't compare to VG '96





On-field sequences? Same story. VG '96 has a lifelike look that would be hard for any game to beat, let alone a prequel that is over a year old.





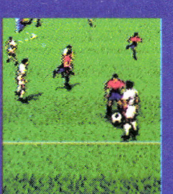
One of the more prominent graphical touches are the multiple light sources shining on the players in VG '96. WWS had simplistic shadows.





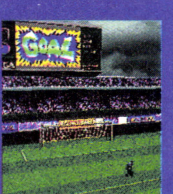
A popular maneuver in both games is the slide steal. Again, VG '96 outshines its predecessor with its more realistic motion-captured players.





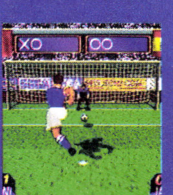
"Hey, don't just stand there!" Improved artificial intelligence in VG '96 has players constantly moving toward the ball. This is not the case in WWS.





Weather Option, Rain or Shine. It's quite evident that WWS has the cloudy skies but where are the actual rain drops? Rain is present in V-Goal.



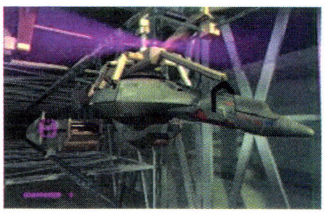


And finally, the infamous penalty kick shoot-out. Here gameplay is about the same but again VG '96 looks much better.



▼ The rendered introduction scenes are of the highest quality around, as we've come to expect from Namco's PlayStation titles.





Galaxian³

Namco takes their huge dual-projection screen arcade game and ports it to the PlayStation with minimal loss.

Publisher: Namco

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Namco

Release: Now (Japan)

Only small pockets of people had been exposed to the full-motion video first-person shooter StarBlade when it first hit U.S. arcades, as the machine required an expensive custom cabinet and spooled video from a LaserDisc player—expensive moving parts are almost always a nightmare for arcade operators—but yet the game proved quite popular with the people who tried it. StarBlade was on the arcade scene before even the comparatively simplistic filled-polygon Nintendo shooter StarFox was shown for the SNES, somehow achieving what looked to be fully 3-D polygonal worlds and characters.

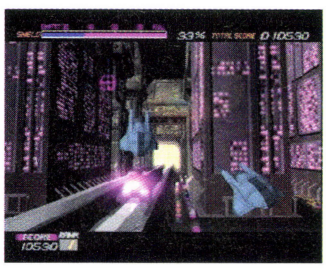
The arcade machine was deluxe beyond even the standard meaning of the word.

Before they became one of the industry's leaders in realtime textured polygon generation, Namco produced some of their polygonal visuals by prerendering lengthy video sequences which played in the background as you shot at relatively simplistic realtime polygonal objects in the foreground. In other words, you watch a movie, point a cursor at spaceships that appear on screen during the movie and press the button to shoot at them, except that the game in actuality is much more exciting than the description might make it sound. Enemies shoot back at you and decrease your shield power, and when your shield energy is



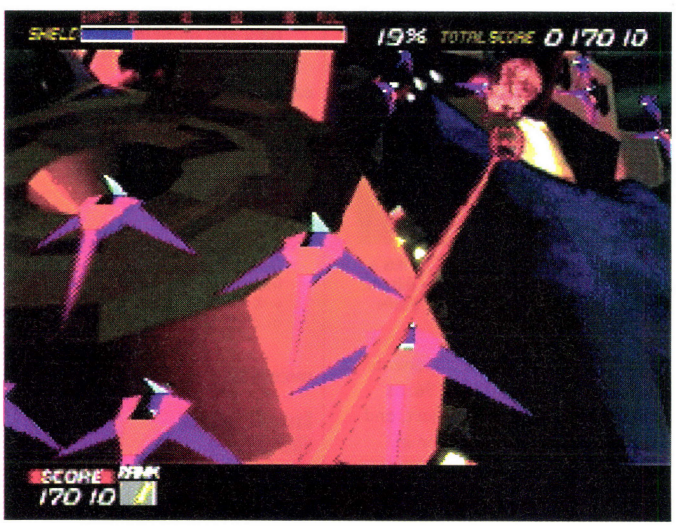
▲ The object of the game is to eliminate the entire enemy fleet while scoring the highest percentage of hits amongst the (up to) four players. The player with the highest hit percentage at the end of the battle earns the rank of number one.





▲ Anyone who has played Namco's recent PlayStation release, StarBlade Alpha, will feel right at home with the "on-rails" style of gameplay and simple play mechanics.

▶ Ignore the visually intense backgrounds and concentrate on the foreground objects; what you'll find are extremely basic polygonal enemies that have little to no depth.



The Bottom Line

Namco's latest arcade FMV shooter conversion has two quick-but-intense Galaxian³ titles on one CD. If you're interested in multiplayer eye candy, Galaxian³ might be reasonable for you, but otherwise, it's a fairly deficient title that doesn't offer any great variety in gameplay or depth. Recommended for shooter fans who aren't overly concerned with long levels and lasting replay value, but perhaps just want a nice, quick visual experience with minimal gameplay.



Colorful background scenes and vivid explosions add to the excitement, although after a few quick playthroughs, it just doesn't make up for the lack of length or variety in gameplay.

sapped, you're dead and your game is over.

Some time after StarBlade, Namco released an even more expensive arcade cabinet with a game based on a larger-scale version of the same technology. This new cabinet was equipped to house up to six players at once in a $3-5 per-play variant on the StarBlade theme, and the game was called Galaxian³.

Of course, the Galaxian name came from Namco's past—the Space Invaders clone with more wild enemy patterns and ship abilities—but the fully textured foreground and background graphics were clearly a step or two above StarBlade's simple filled polygons. Moreover, the arcade machine was deluxe beyond even the standard meaning of the word, equipped with dual huge projection screens and booming, all-encompassing audio that made the game worth trying at least once. Unlike StarBlade, which was a reasonable multistage challenge in its own right, Galaxian³ was designed specifically to be played only a few times by a given person: You get unlimited laser blasts and a shield to protect you during a quick (under 10 minutes) blast of intense shooting action (if you play through to the end of the video sequence), and there are no multiple paths or twisting levels to work through.



The advantage to having video running on an entirely separate plane from the actual gameplay shows in scenes like this, where it gives off the illusion of zooming down a hollowed tunnel, not unlike those found in the Death Star scenes of Return of the Jedi.

After a few months, the handful of risk-taking arcade operators could swap out Project Dragoon, the first piece of Galaxian³ software, and replace it with another quick-bang title, Galaxian³: The Rising of Gourb. Gourb is even more impressive as a whole than Dragoon, but both games share identically shallow play mechanics and the same overall appeal that mainly focuses on aesthetical qualities, rather than depth of gameplay.



The second episode, The Rising of Gourb, has its own impressive introduction, ironically in English this time, with Japanese subtitles.

As both games together seem to go by faster than StarBlade did alone, Namco decided to package both Galaxian³ arcade titles on a single compact disc and add a bevy of fun options to the package to increase its value. Four players can play at once with a Multi Tap, and Galaxian³ supports all of the major PlayStation peripherals from the NeGcon to the mouse and analog joysticks, in addition to supporting the rare Japanese "Wide" televisions equipped with theater-style 16:9 aspect ratios. As the action gets intense, able-bodied computer-controlled gunners can be set up to assist you in the blasting, and you can record your missions for later playback if so desired.

How close are the ports to the arcade originals? Like the PlayStation version of StarBlade, the port isn't as spectacular as one might expect: The frame rate isn't that high and both artifacting and color reduction are especially noticeable in Project Dragoon—fortunately, the Gourb game looks much better. There's a bit of music and a lot of Japanese speech littered throughout the game, ostensibly cockpit dialogue, which doesn't add a lot or detract at all from the experience—no one bothered to create a full soundtrack for either Galaxian³ title. Overall, both Dragoon and Gourb survived the translation process generally intact, and the changes would seem even more minimal if you could duplicate the arcade setup at home. (For some reason, Namco retained the small seam between projection screens in the center of the home television screen, but did so only for Dragoon—sort of odd.)

The port isn't as spectacular as one might expect. The frame rate isn't that high and both artifacting and color reduction are especially noticeable.

All of the options and nice visuals help to obscure the fact that Galaxian³ is a simplistic multiplayer blast-a-thon with little lasting value and only graphics to bolster its reputation. It's a perfect title for fans of arcade LaserDisc games—heaven knows that Dragon's Lair ports are still all over the place—but other players will likely tire quickly of what little is available.

IG





What would a three-dimensional shooter be without at least one scene of fast-paced asteroid-dodging? The feel in this one is more like Star Fox, where you actually have the ability to destroy the meteors before they crash into your ship.

http://www.namco.com/

GRAPHICS: B+
+/- The video is pretty smooth, although not totally fluid.
+/- Great polygon intensity, but low frame rate.

SOUNDS: B-
+ Audio effects are decent, but...
- There isn't a lot to listen to in the first place.

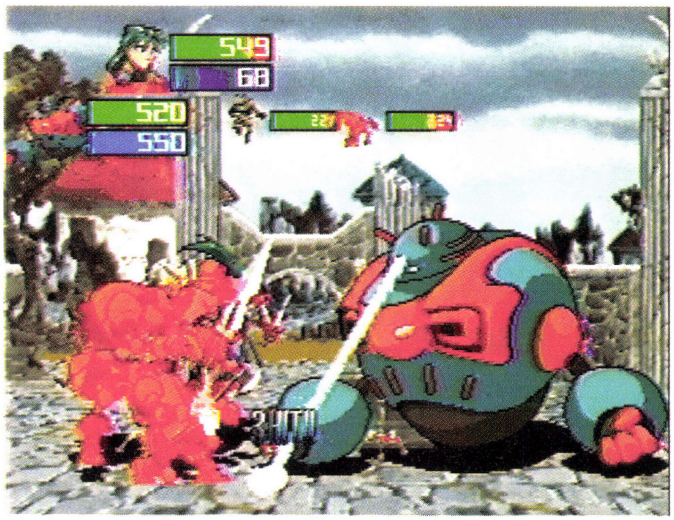
GAMEPLAY: B-
+ Shoot at anything that moves.
- It hardly seems to matter if you hit all the targets or not.

LASTING POWER: D
- The grade would have been even lower...
+ If it weren't for the multiplayer feature.

ARCADE TRANSLATION: B
+ Looks generally the same as the arcade game, but...
- Visuals are grainier, and video is a tad less smooth.

OVERALL: C+

Intelligent Gamer "AVERAGE"



▶ As you can see by this photo, many of the characters in the game are huge, typical of a Treasure game—and there is always something going on on-screen.

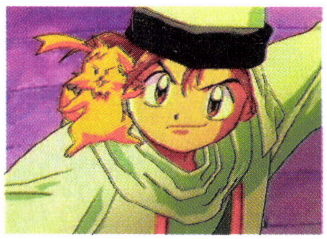
Guardian Heroes

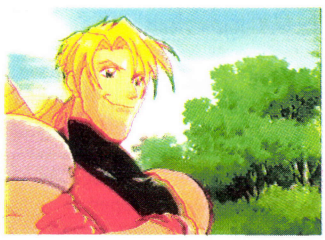
Treasure delivers big-time action once again in Guardian Heroes

Publisher: Sega of America
Platform: Saturn
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Treasure
Release: Available Now

Back in the April issue of *IG's FUSION*, we reviewed the import version of Guardian Heroes, and while we don't normally "re-review" a game, we felt we did owe it to Sega of America to once again take a look at GH, being that we neglected to mention that the version reviewed in April was in fact the Japanese version of the game.

The story of Guardian Heroes is basically identical to the import version, and despite rumors of major story line changes, the overall translation was in fact quite good, compared to some less-inspired efforts by Sega, such as Mystaria—a fabulous game with a very poor translation—or Phantasy Star IV for the Genesis, which was hurt by character name changes that conflicted with the names from previous PS games.





▲ The full-screen animated intro in the beginning of the game is one of the best-looking introductions in a Saturn game to date; some of the video still seems a bit grainy, but considering it does fill the entire screen and it's fairly long and colorful, it works well.

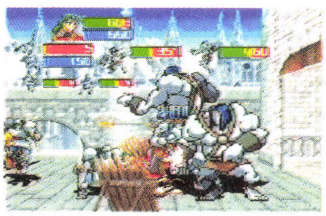
Translation aside, what lies here is a very solid game. Take Final Fight's side-scrolling style of fighting gameplay, add some beautifully crafted hand-drawn characters, throw in a ton (yes, a TON) of options for the player to choose from and finally, add that Treasure touch (the company has a marvelous gift for throwing what seems like hundreds of objects on screen at once with minimal slowdown) and what you end up with is a fantastic-looking Saturn game that is just plain fun to play.

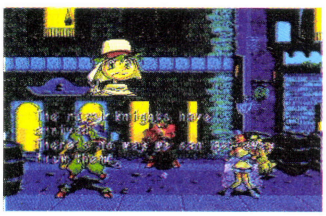
There are two main playing modes, Story Mode and Vs. Mode. In Story Mode, one or two players choose from four characters (a fifth character is added after you've beaten the game once) and team up to take on the enemy over multiple paths that lead you through different areas (and constantly changing story lines) depending on which route you choose and what actions you take during the game. Overall, there are 30 different stages and several different end Bosses to face. Vs. Mode, on the other hand, is a virtual free-for-all in which up to six players can get together in a variety of different ways (team up with others, fight independently, set handicaps, etc.) and do battle using over 40 different characters from the Story Mode (whoever you defeat in Story Mode becomes playable in the Vs. Mode—a great feature).

The entire game is fully hand-drawn; no 3-D polygon rendered, tri-linear, anti-aliased mishmosh here...

Graphically, Guardian Heroes looks great. The animation in the intro is top-notch (and full screen, too), and the entire game is fully hand-drawn; no 3-D polygon rendered, tri-linear, anti-aliased mishmosh here—just pure colorful artwork that looks fabulous. There is a bit of pixelization in the scaling, but it's to be expected, and it hardly detracts from the gameplay at hand. The audio is nice as well, with a good variety of musical styles in the soundtrack, and very effective sound effects.

All in all, there's not much bad that can be said about Guardian Heroes, and while we could go on forever about the various features of the game, we'll instead finish up by highly recommending GH to anyone who is into fast-paced action games or side-scrolling fighters. For a more in-depth look, check out the April issue of *IGF*.





▲ The translation of Guardian Heroes was done quite well, with a lot of the obscure Japanese references left in, although admittedly, you'll still find some campy American humor now and then.

http://www.sega.com/

GRAPHICS: B+
+ Beautifully drawn artwork and wild magic spell effects.
- Large characters get highly pixelated when up close.

SOUNDS: A-
+ Nicely orchestrated, mood-fitting tunes and good all-around sound effects add to the game's realism.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ Multiple-hit combos are very easy to pull off and are a delight to watch.
+/- Gameplay doesn't offer anything outrageously new.

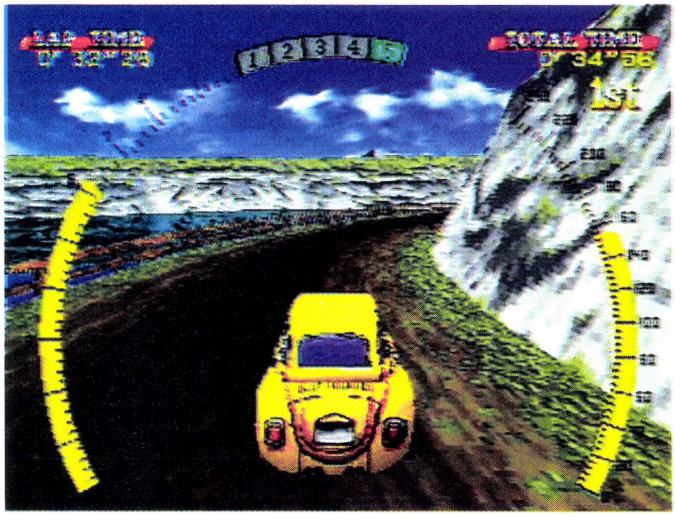
LASTING POWER: A
+ Multiple paths make for new experiences each and every time you play.
+ Plenty of in-game options and six-player support will surely keep you occupied.

OVERALL: A-
Intelligent Gamer "HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"


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Look out, it's Herbie the Love Bug! After several upgrades including a new transmission, engine and spoiler, not even the Ferrari can catch this Beetle...





ChoroQ

Tamsoft and Takara deliver a cutesy racer with solid play mechanics

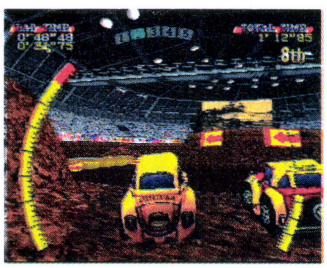
Publisher: Takara

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Tamsoft

Release: Now (Japan)





A key feature of ChoroQ is the inspired track design, from an off-road stadium track to a track where players leap through waterfalls on a raging river.

No Web Address Available

After the success of Tamsoft and Takara's Toshinden series, it seems reasonable to expect that the two companies would try their hands in the 3-D race genre as well. After all, the other two companies who have produced very successful 3-D fighting games (Sega and Namco) have strong lineups of racing games as well...

What sets ChoroQ apart from other 3-D polygon racers is a decidedly cutesy look, created through the use of "super-deformed" cars, which strongly resemble the "Penny Racer" toy cars that Takara marketed here in the early 1980s. Don't be fooled, though; Tamsoft has managed to implement a fairly strong racing game underneath the disarmingly cute graphics.

Don't be fooled; Tamsoft has implemented a strong racing game underneath the disarmingly cute pics.

The game is fairly typical in One-player Mode: Win races, make money, upgrade the car, lather, rinse, repeat. ChoroQ is initially extraordinarily frustrating, as the stock car handles like a brick on skids and accelerates like a lawn mower in need of a tune-up. If you can keep from pitching the controller into the screen early on, the game gets much more interesting as you upgrade the car.

One thing that should be noted is that everything in the game needs to be purchased, even freebies in other games like a choice of transmissions. After you upgrade the shocks, engine, tires, wing and transmission, ChoroQ picks up speed and the car begins to actually hold the turns.

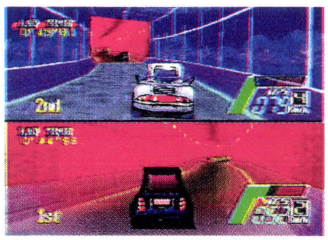
Major disappointments are the lack of analog controller support and two-player link-up play, though the game does feature a Two-player Split Screen Mode with a significantly reduced frame rate. ChoroQ does have quite a bit of replay value, with new upgrades and tracks appearing after the game is "beaten," however.

Car handling, even after the car has been upgraded into a thrumming monstrosity, is occasionally irrational. Most of the time, though, the car handles as you'd expect.

The track diversity is one of the best features of ChoroQ. There are at least 13 tracks available, ranging from a simple 400m drag strip to a psychotic twisty mountain road (with multiple paths) that lacks guardrails on certain key turns. An interesting thing about some of the more complex tracks is the shortcuts which you can exploit, lending some degree of exploration to the game.

Graphics are slightly below average for the genre; although there is very little pop-up, polygons weren't assembled quite properly in the levels, and occasionally this has an interesting effect: Roads look reflective the way that asphalt on the horizon looks on a hot day. The problem is when you see jittery cracks in track walls. Frame rate is generally adequate, though there are spots where it becomes truly unpleasant.

Sound is generally good, with varied track music ranging from generic rock video game BGM to a Mariachi-style tune. Effects are pretty much par for the course, with realistic track noise and fairly standard collision effects.



While ChoroQ lacks link capability, it does offer a Split Screen Mode, which, unfortunately, is choppy at best.

Overall, ChoroQ is a worthwhile racing game with adequate aesthetics but above-average gameplay and replay value. Patience is the key here, though; if you're into instant gratification, you probably won't get the most out of the game, as it really does get better the deeper you get. IG

GRAPHICS: B-
+/- Graphics are very cutesy and colorful.
- Frame rate is unimpressive, and the game suffers from meshing errors.

SOUND: B
+ Wide selection of track music.
+/- Sound effects are nothing special.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ Solid racing gameplay, coupled with inspired track design...
- ...once the car is upgraded to a reasonable level, which takes time.

LASTING POWER: A-
+ Solid one-player game, with lots of tracks, secrets, and upgrades.
- Two-player Mode is not nearly as much fun as it should be.

OVERALL: B+

Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED"

THE 21st CENTURY IS HERE

An ordinary woman transformed into a virtual reality nightmare...

Genetically-enhanced killers who hunt in two linked bodies at once...

A religious conspiracy that could shatter the universe...





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▶ Hyper 3-D Pinball might have fared better if it weren't hyped up by its title; the game really doesn't offer anything major in terms of "hyper" action or 3-D graphics.

Hyper 3-D Pinball

Virgin's new pinball sim fails to come across as "Hyper" or "3-D"

Publisher: Virgin

Platform: Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: NMS Software

Release: 2nd Quarter '96

The immediate thought that comes to mind upon booting Virgin's Hyper 3-D Pinball is that the game was cynically and intentionally misnamed in an effort to confuse customers looking for a 32-Bit pinball experience. Having enjoyed such classic console pinball titles as Dragon's Fury (Devil's Crush) for the Genesis and TurboGrafx-16 and found some passable if not respectable such games as Meldac and Nintendo's Super Pinball for the SNES, we came upon Hyper 3-D Pinball with a reasonable set of expectations. Perhaps there would be some moving targets. Maybe there would be something special.

Or maybe not. Hyper 3-D Pinball is little more than a PC-style high-resolution and decidedly flat pinball game—to describe it as either "Hyper" or "3-D" would be unfair if not blatantly misrepresentative. The disc houses six separate pinball machines, each with a unique theme ranging from an old-fashioned horror movie table to a cross-country road trip-themed table to a carnival funhouse table, and the essential elements of generally modern pinball are there: A little red LED screen pops up now and then to show your score data, graphical displays and chintzy bonus games, and each table has a few bonus traps, elevated surfaces and bumpers to break up the flipper action somewhat.





▲ Visually impressive—perhaps, had this been a 16-Bit title. However, sluggish gameplay and sub-par handling don't say much for Hyper 3-D Pinball.

http://www.vie.com/low/games/hyper.html

What's really sad, however, is how blandly the elements come together. We're talking about a 32-Bit pinball simulation which has implemented on 16-Bit machines, and the only thing saving Hyper 3-D Pinball from visual oblivion is its competent use of both the Saturn's high-resolution mode and a pleasant if not extraordinary combination of hand-drawn table illustrations and rendered objects. Oddly, the game is occasionally interrupted by prerendered cinematic scenes showing the ball falling into a hole here or there, which does little for the player and interrupts the minor-league intensity that has just begun to build. Audio is spotty—sound effects are okay, with some annoying effects in the funhouse stage and reasonable voices otherwise, and music is generally quite clear but comprised of several short, looping tracks.

As far as gameplay is concerned, none of the boards are laid out with particular ingenuity, but they're not horrible, either, and a couple of unique ideas did find their way into the mix. From a pure pinball simulation standpoint, the physics aren't great (we've seen balls travel seemingly against gravity in some cases), the ball launcher doesn't control well and the best thing that can be said is that there are two different ways to tilt the machine.

It would be easy to classify Virgin's effort as a waste of 32-Bit programming if there wasn't some inherent value in having six machines on the disc, but their presence—albeit hardly better than SNES quality—could justify this as a worthwhile title for some people. Overall, we can't recommend Hyper 3-D Pinball in good faith. IG



▲ The table graphics try hard to replicate the peculiar but wicked artwork of pinball games of the past such as Devil's Crush and Fantastic Pinball.

Perhaps there would be some moving targets. Maybe there would be something special...Or maybe not.

two visual modes: You either look at the table from straight above, which gives you no sense of depth, or take a fixed three-fourths view from the front of the machine, which frequently obscures your view of the rear areas of the boards. Both modes have been tried and more successfully

GRAPHICS: C-
+ High-resolution and reasonable hand-drawn art.
- As flat and boring as 16-Bit. Release this for the SNES.

SOUNDS: C
+/- Good music and okay sound effects, neither of which have enough presence.

GAMEPLAY: C-
- So-so physical model with needlessly frustrating ball handling.
+/- Has the essentials of pinball without the fine-tuning that could have made it a wee bit better.

LASTING POWER: A-
+ Six machines on a single disc is definitely the way to go.
+/- Making the rest of the game a bit more refined would have made playing those machines a lot more worthwhile.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer "AVERAGE"

C+





◀ Poor Sylvia was dragged out of her old-age home so that she might be rescued once again by Thomas (now a retired toll booth operator).

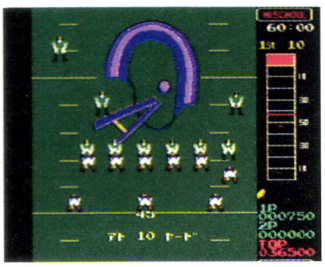
Irem Arcade Classics

I'Max brings back the golden years of Irem with Irem Arcade Classics

Publisher: I'Max
Platform: Saturn, PS
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Irem/I'Max
Release: Now (Japan)

When most avid gamers hear the name Irem, they think of the much-ballyhooed R-Type series—strategic shooters which rewarded players for thinking and prevented them from simply laying waste to everything on screen. Some may be aware of the Xing and T*HQ conversion of their more recent submarine shooter In the Hunt, and true fans of the company may even recall that such colorful TurboGrafx-16 titles as Ninja Spirit and Vigilante originated with Irem.

Now I'Max of Japan is taking gamers back even further (1983-84) with Irem Arcade Classics, a disc which attempts for Irem what Namco has achieved with their Museum Volumes—affordable, nostalgia-evoking perfect arcade translations of ancient games. This time around, you get three old games with a few new frills, including slightly better arranged music and a small complement of arcade-style dipswitch options to mess around with. But will you really want to turn your TV on its end to play a truly arcade-perfect version of Zippy Race? Read on.



▲ Look out NFL GameDay! John Madden stand back! The classic 10-Yard Fight is faithfully reproduced, and despite it's lack of, well, everything, it's still a fun game.

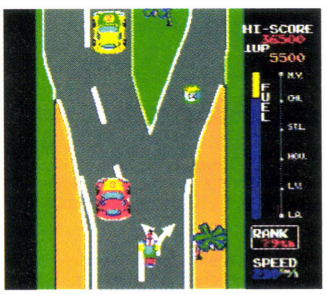
The most recognizable of the three is Kung Fu Master (the original arcade version of the classic NES walk-and-fight title Kung Fu), which confusingly enough appears here under its original Japanese name, Spartan X. As beat-'em-up fare goes, Kung Fu Master has aged relatively well: As a (surprise) kung fu master, you're (surprise) trying to rescue your girlfriend by (surprise) punching and kicking legions of distinctively 8-Bit-quality foes. Though the old-fashioned graphics won't win awards, there's an Irem-trademarked level of challenge and strategy in each of the game's short levels.

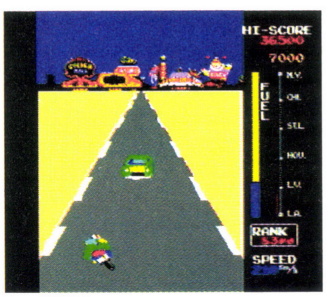
I'Max's other big find here is 10-Yard Fight, an early arcade football title which is just about as simple as they come nowadays. As another NES port, 10-Yard Fight was successful in an era when your game was advanced if you could use semi-humanoid characters to move the pigskin up and down the field, and the arcade conversion here holds true to that formula for success. If you like your football simplistic, 10-Yard Fight is just that sort of game, and you can even turn your monitor on its side to view the game from its original arcade vertical screen orientation.

The most obscure of the three Irem titles is Zippy Race, an arcade motorcycle racing title released in US arcades by Williams as Motorace USA—but like the others, it won't blow your mind. You race from coast to coast across the U.S. in two perspectives: The majority of your time is spent in an overhead game of "pass the enemy cars to get to first place," but there is also a pseudo 3-D "behind the cycle" perspective in between over head segments.

Will you really want to turn your TV on its end to play a truly arcade-perfect version of Zippy Race?

Let's be frank: There's little doubt that these games look and feel like 8-Bit software, and there's nary a question that every member of *IG*'s staff is pining more for an "Irem R-Type Collection" than a half-handful of games from 12 years ago. There's nothing particularly compelling about any of the Arcade Classics titles—except perhaps Kung Fu Master—unless you've played them before and want to relive old memories, but if you're in that boat, I'Max's disc just might be for you. IG





▲ As you can see by the above pictures, each area in Zippy Race is represented quite faithfully, even the beautifully lit town of Las Vegas. Hey—in the bottom pic—isn't that Arnie in the green car?! Hey Arnie!

No Web Site Available

GRAPHICS: D
- Generic 1984 quality artwork.
- Animation, colors, etc. are all below today's standards.

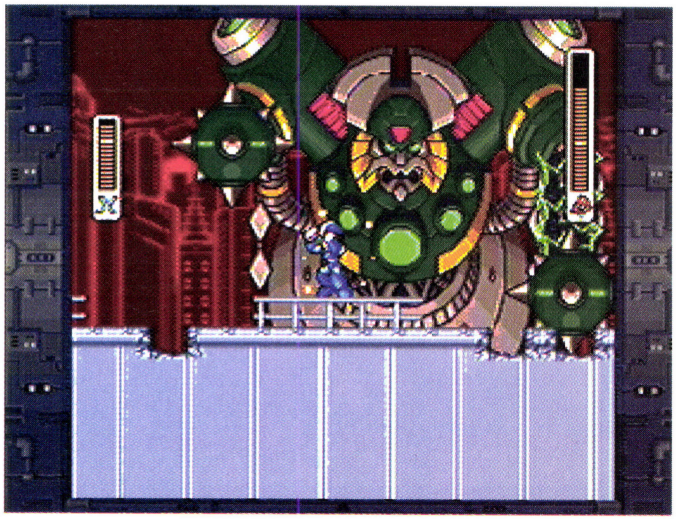
SOUNDS: C
+ Original and arranged music.
- Tracks are short, and few and far between.

GAMEPLAY: B-
+ Simplistic, yet very addictive.
- Not an alternative to more modern games in these genres.

LASTING POWER: C
+ Three quick, but somewhat entertaining games.
- You'll blow through them in no time at all.

ARCADE TRANSLATION: A
+ All of the arcade's original appeal, with some added options and features.
+/- Three no-frills Irem games, and still no sign of R-Type!

OVERALL: C+
Intelligent Gamer "AVERAGE"



▶ Huge bosses have always been a mainstay of the Mega Man series, and this time around it's no different. The border around the screen is a bit of an annoyance but really doesn't detract from the game.

Mega Man X3

Capcom's Blue Bomber makes his 32-Bit debut in a rehash of last fall's SNES game

Publisher: Capcom

Platform: Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Capcom

Release: Now (Japan)

Over the past 10 years or so, Capcom has been notorious for bringing gamers constant updates to their highly successful Mega Man series of platform action games. The latest addition to the Blue Bomber's robotic repertoire is Mega Man X3, originally a Super NES title, now ported to the Sony PlayStation and (reviewed here) Sega Saturn.

For the four or five of you who've never actually played a Mega Man title, the basic premise is this: You control Mega Man, taking him through eight stages of mechanical mayhem before reaching the final stage, which usually consists of yet another four stages, followed by a final climactic battle with the end boss(es). This time around, it's an evil scientist known as Dr. Doppler who took control of the Mavericks (evil robots who originated in the first Mega Man X game) and unleashed them on the once peaceful land.

The game opens with an all-new full-screen, fairly impressive animated intro, complete with campy Japanese lyricism and typical anime-style artwork. The quality of the video is relatively high (especially compared to most Saturn FMV), and the intro is fairly long as well. Once the game begins, however, it's a virtual carbon-copy of the Super NES version, with slightly crisper graphics, better music and sound effects, animated introductions to each stage and the option to save to the Saturn's internal memory (in addition to the customary password save that is utilized in the SNES version). What's more, the main gameplay screen is actually surrounded by a border on both its left and right sides, giving it a cropped look. In actuality, however, the game is not cropped, but instead displayed in a taller, more arcade-style look which, remarkably, looks even better than the "wide" Super NES version when compared side-by-side. Apparently, the reasoning behind the borders is that the Saturn hardware does not support a specific graphical mode that the original Mega Man X3 was programmed in, while PlayStation hardware does (which is why the PS version has no borders).





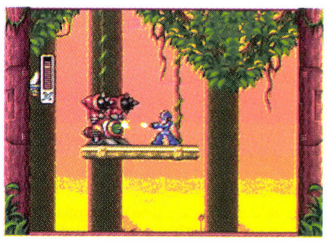
▲ The major difference between the original Super NES version of Mega Man X3 and the new Saturn and PlayStation versions is the inclusion of new anime sequences both before and after the game, as well as between stages (as each character is introduced).

Other than the obvious change in screen size however, the rest of the game's graphics are decidedly 16-Bit looking, with only a few visual touch-ups made throughout the game. Naturally, the resolution is crisper and more defined, and the color palette is put to better use, but otherwise Mega Man X3 is basically a Super NES game in Saturn clothing.

Audio, on the other hand, is of a higher quality, with the already moderately enjoyable Super NES soundtrack being given the upgrade to CD-quality tunes.

All in all, Mega Man X3 combines solid gameplay with only slightly above-average aesthetics to bring action/platform fans a somewhat enjoyable experience that really doesn't do much to show off any 32-Bit power. With no plans for a U.S. release, however, Mega Man fanatics will have to wait until the fall when both Mega Man 8 and Mega Man X4 are released stateside for both the Saturn and PlayStation. IG





▲ Other than better resolution and a wider use of colors, the in-game graphics are basically a direct port from the Super NES version of the game. The taller look provides a more "arcade-style" feel.

Other than the obvious change in screen size, the rest of the game's graphics are decidedly 16-Bit looking.

GRAPHICS: B-
+ Impressive full-screen anime.
- In-game graphics are ported right from the SNES version.

SOUNDS: B+
+ Sound effects have been improved dramatically.
+ Music is of the traditional "fast-rock" Mega Man style.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+/- Play mechanics are nothing new to Mega Man fans...
+ But as the saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

LASTING POWER: C+
+ Lots of hidden items and power-ups to obtain.
- Once you finish it, there isn't much reason to play again.

OVERALL: B

Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED"

http://www.capcoment.com/



Golf fanatics will surely be enthralled by the depth and realism of Konami's The Final Round. The only downer is that there are a limited number of players to choose from and courses to play on.

The Final Round

Take to the links in Konami's impressive new golf offering

Publisher: Konami
Platform: PlayStation
Format: Single CD-ROM
Developer: Konami
Release: 2nd Quarter '96

In all candor, *IG* has played a large number of golf games over the years and has noted with great dismay that electronic representations of the sport have changed very little. Part of the problem can be traced to the prevalence of T&E Soft's aging, clean and now unremarkable Polysys 3-D engine in the marketplace, and another part can be blamed on the attitude of developers toward making dramatic improvements to a sports genre enjoyed mostly by much older and/or less discriminating gamers.

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, for example, different companies from HAL to SNK were releasing home and arcade golf titles that had unique visual and play concepts. When T&E Soft debuted their SNES version of the Polysys 3-D engine—a simple set of course-generating routines which would stand still and redraw the screen in slow, incremental movements every time you hit the ball—who would have thought that their model would wind up as the common benchmark for mid-1990s golf games?



Solid gameplay and beautiful graphics help push The Final Round above the rest of the pack of console golf games released over the past few years.

Now that golf has come to 32-Bit systems, companies have been given a chance to make use of realtime 3-D graphics in designing their courses. Konami's The Final Round comes as close to visual golf perfection as has been attempted to date, utilizing polygonal course artwork and motion-captured polygonal players to deliver the first major improvements to home golfing in five or more years.

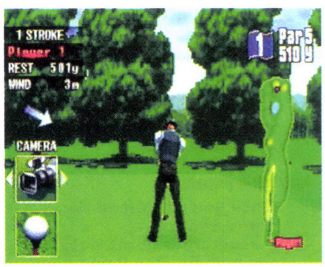
Konami's The Final Round comes as close to visual golf perfection as has been attempted to date.

Changes are noticeable from the moment you begin to play the game, as Konami takes you through each hole using realtime 3-D graphics and audio tracks which are decidedly more funky and eclectic than the bathtime for baby music that has been used endlessly in the last 50 home golf games. Once you're on the course and ready to tee off, you're first offered the choice between a wide variety of camera angles and then given both a full view of the ball in motion and an automatic replay from a different perspective if you so desire.

What helps The Final Round tremendously is its smooth and nearly intuitive user interface. When you're adjusting your power (to a maximum of 100 percent) for a shot, for example, not only is the meter clearly marked off for every 20 percent of power, but the process of choosing your expenditure of power has been improved over older golf games: At just the right pace to prove a challenge, the meter jumps up to maximum power with one button press then decreases just quickly enough to allow you a pretty good shot at choosing how much of a whack you want to take at the ball. Meters scale in and out of the screen to add even more to the appeal.

As great as The Final Round is as an arcade-style golf game, there are a few small caveats for golfing and technology die-hards: It doesn't sport a real course license such as Pebble Beach or Waialae, it doesn't have copious amounts of running play-by-play commentary and the trees in the 3-D course are just scaling flat sprites. Thankfully, the game's many assets—including reflective water, great player animations, inspired (if infrequent) music and friendly interface—compensate almost entirely for its minor omissions. IG





There are multiple camera angles you can choose from, from right up near the golfer, to high up in the sky, looking down.

http://www.konami.com/golf.htm

GRAPHICS: A
+ Realtime 3-D course and camera movement is a large step forward.
+ Smooth, realistic polygonal characters.

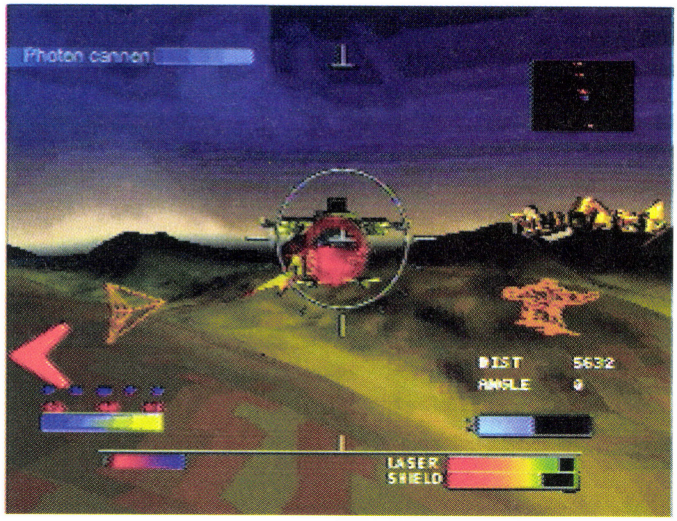
SOUNDS: B
+ What's there is very good...
- ...but more in-game music and voices would have helped.

GAMEPLAY: A+
+ As useful and versatile an interface as has yet been implemented in a golf game.
+ Players can make the game easier or more difficult using optional settings and Easy Shot Mode.

LASTING POWER: B
- A CD-ROM with only 18 holes? They could have put more courses on the disc.
+ Not horrible in this department, but more could have been done.

OVERALL: A-

Intelligent Gamer "HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"



Targeting is a little difficult to get the hang of at first, but fortunately, you can lock on to your enemies and then let your trigger finger do the rest.

The Raven Project

Mindscape's latest is visually stimulating, but lacks in gameplay

Publisher: Mindscape

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

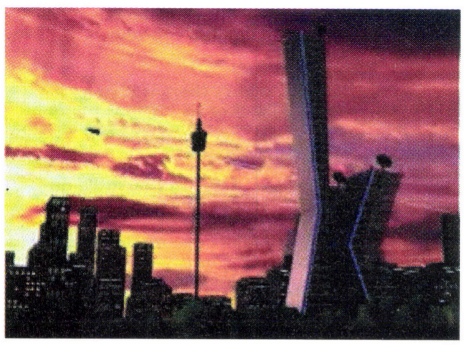
Developer: Cryo Interactive

Release: Now Available

While having the best of both worlds in a game is something that any gamer might relish, had it been done right, Mindscape's attempt at fulfilling this goal falls somewhat short with The Raven Project.

The Raven Project feels like an experiment gone wrong: Take an oversimplified version of Wing Commander and mate it to a lobotomized Mech Warrior. The results produce a title that is neither a good robot nor a good fighter action-simulation.

Raven Project has many problems, but perhaps the most major is that it is way too elementary. Each mission you attempt to complete will either let you pilot a fighter or several varieties of armored robots. Although you are allowed to partially alter the allotments of weapons in the vehicle that will be used in the mission, you aren't given the decision of which vehicle you would like to pilot, ruining a potentially strategic element to the gameplay.



Once again, we have a 32-Bit game that goes heavy on the gorgeously rendered FMV sequences, but barely goes at all on the important aspects: gameplay and replayability. I'll play my SNES, thanks.

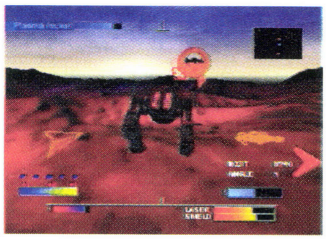
Repetitiousness mixed with bland flavor leaves a large blemish on Raven Project's action-oriented gameplay. The fighter plane and all of the mechs are very much similar, and the only levels that seem tailor-made to the fighter are some of the outer space battlegrounds. Even this argument is ruined, however, since one of the levels places you in the cockpit of a hybrid mech/plane that looks like an aircraft with legs. Although Raven has many missions, most of them are virtually the same, with variations consisting of token escort and scouting missions, neither of which are executed very competently. The outer space stories have a very phony feel to them, as they don't effectively portray a feeling of ascent or descent in flight.

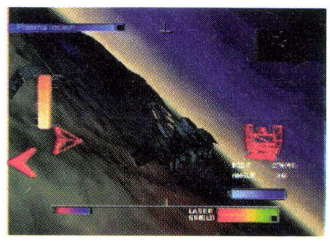
Another problem is that there is simply not enough to do in the missions other than to destroy the same enemies over and over. Even some of the missions that attempt to add a little spice to the routine such as reconnaissance and escort missions fall flat. There are no power-up items to pick up to improve your arsenal, and no "Boss" enemies to provide an extra challenge or climax at the end of any of the levels. The whole exercise of playing Raven Project often becomes a routine rather than an exciting experience.

Repetitiousness mixed with bland flavor leaves a large blemish on Raven Project's gameplay.

On the upside, the game has nice all-around aesthetics. The texture-mapped, 3-D graphics move fluently and at an ample frame rate, making the game control responsive and unhindered. The CD-spooled soundtracks are also a welcome addition ranging from moody science-fiction themes to funky techno tracks.

Overall, Raven Project is a game that has high technical successes, but ranks very low on gameplay merit. The result is a great-looking, but otherwise shallow and easily forgettable action game. IG





Each area is fully texture-mapped and the animation of your fighter vehicles is fairly nice, but overall the gameplay just doesn't deliver, and certain movements, such as looking up at the sky and moving forward simultaneously, look totally unrealistic.

GRAPHICS: B+
+ Solid, detailed 3-D graphics.
+ Excellent 3-D rendered FMV sequences.

SOUNDS: B
+ A good CD soundtrack with adequate sound effects.

GAMEPLAY: C-
+/- Some of the missions are entertaining, but they become way too repetitious way too easily.
- Very few compelling or original elements.

LASTING POWER: D+
- Once you've finished the game, that's it.
- A repetitious game does not lend itself to long-lasting play.

OVERALL:
Intelligent Gamer
"BELOW AVERAGE"

http://www.mindscape.com/msgames/Raven/index.html

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Mystery Word Grid

	H				
		E			
P	I	N	C	H	W
	R				
S					

MYSTERY WORD

WORD LIST and LETTER CODE chart

PINCH .....W	PRESS .....K	BLAST .....A	WRECK .....D
BREAK .....Z	PUNCH .....S	SPRAY C	TURBO V
STOMP .....T	STAND .....R	PRESS .....E	DREAM ....O
CRUSH I	SCORE .....H	SLANT L	CHASE .....P

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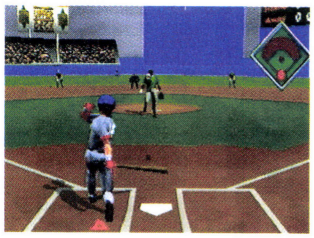
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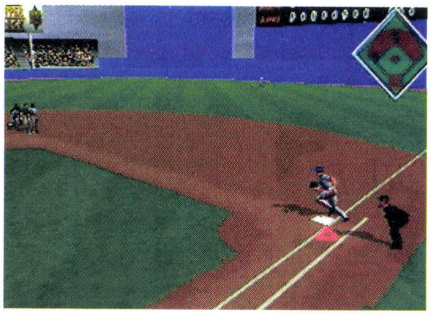
Triple Play 97

EA steps up to the plate with the finest 32-Bit baseball yet

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Platform: PlayStation
Release: Now Available



▲ Triple Play Baseball offers the player many different options to adjust the camera while pitching, fielding and batting.



Despite EA Sports' success and downright dominance of the sports gaming market, their Achilles' Heel has always been their baseball titles. Developing on 32-Bit platforms seems to have provided a steel boot for this heel, as Triple Play '97 is not only a good baseball game, but also one of EA Sports' strongest 32-Bit sports titles to date.

Triple Play '97 has just about everything you would want in a baseball game: great gameplay, good looks and a variety of statistics and options. The game also has a variety of licenses ranging from the MLBPA to Stats Inc.

Action takes place in 3-D environments comprised of "Virtual Stadiums" which accurately represent their respective real-life counterparts. Although the baseball players aren't polygonal like their environments, they do fit into their surroundings rather well. The only flaw with the graphics is that some of the animations are a bit choppy, particularly those of the batter at the plate.

In addition to great graphics, the game has very impressive audio. The play-by-play announcer is very competent with a large repertoire of comments, and the in-game organ music helps re-create the stadium atmosphere. There is even some quality music during the menu screens.

The options in Triple Play are numerous, consisting of a Home Run Derby, an All-Star Game, a comprehensive Manager Mode, as well as up to eight-player support. The most interesting option may be EA's signature "Create a Player" option which allows you to put yourself into the game or create any athlete from scratch.

Without a doubt, Triple Play '97 is one of the premier 32-Bit baseball games on the market. Whether you're an avid fan, or just a casual sports player, there is something for everyone in this title. IG

GRAPHICS: B+
+ Awesome game presentation and excellent 3-D stadiums.
+ A few of the player animations are choppy.

SOUNDS: A-
+ Excellent in-game announcer and authentic organ music credibly re-create stadium atmosphere.
+ Great music during menus.

GAMEPLAY: A-
+ Every feature you want plus more help to keep this game fresh.
+ The game is very realistic, with the ability to cater to the novice gamer.

LASTING POWER: A-
+ Any great sports game will last a long time, and Triple Play falls into this category.

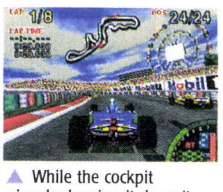
OVERALL: A-
Intelligent Gamer
"HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"

F1 Challenge

Virgin's F1 offering sits in pole position

Publisher: Virgin
Platform: Saturn
Release: Now Available





▲ While the cockpit view looks nice, it doesn't facilitate a good view of the oncoming track.

While Psygnosis' forthcoming release Formula One for the PlayStation (featured in the May issue of *IG's FUSION*) promises to be stellar for the Sony system, Virgin's current release, F1 Challenge (based on the Sega of Japan title F1 Live Information) is now up for judgment by Saturn race fans everywhere.

F1Challenge includes six tracks featuring Suzuka, Hockenheim and Monte Carlo, and three other fictitious tracks. Players choose from a selection of five F1 teams, each represented by their actual team driver, i.e., Michael Shumacher for the Renault, Jean Alesi for team Ferrari and so on. Other variables controlled by the player for this one-player game are tire traction (grip or long life), pitch and angle of both the front and rear airfoils, and the fuel capacity of the car.

Some features of F1 Challenge



are understandable and useful such as the car modifications and adjustments. Players not only need to master turning and braking, but they also must set their cars up correctly for maximum efficiency if they expect to win. Other elements, like the inclusion of the real drivers, seem unnecessary and don't add anything to the game. In addition, the anemic breaking-glass noise you hear whenever the car hits the rails can be quite annoying. On the upside, F1C has great gameplay. Car control is smooth and responsive to the touch while braking is realistically represented. Sadly missing is the live commentary from which the Japanese version derived its name.

F1C's main drawback is in its unrealistic-looking polygonal graphics that make the car's tires look like lego blocks; but if players can get over the look of the polygonal graphics, they'll find a racing game that is quite solid. And in the end, it's gameplay that determines the worth and longevity of a game, and Virgin's F1 Challenge has plenty of it. IG

GRAPHICS: C+
+ Nice extras, especially the sparks thrown off the underside of the cars.
- Among other things, chunky octagonal tires look "Flintstonish."

SOUNDS: B
+/- Motor sound is okay, but gets slightly annoying after extended gameplay.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ Control of the vehicle is smooth and responsive.
- Interaction with other cars (bumps and crashes) doesn't appear realistic.

LASTING POWER: B+
+ Five tracks provide a good amount of challenge for hardcore race-sim fans.
- Game may get slightly boring for gamers with short attention spans.

OVERALL: B+
Intelligent Gamer
"RECOMMENDED"

Double Dragon

The Lee Brothers return in Technos' new Neo*Geo port

Publisher: Technos
Platform: PlayStation
Release: Now (Japan)



▲ The "Tiny 3-D" mode offers a basically worthless rotating screen effect that does nothing more than, well, rotate. It's bad enough most 3-D games don't cut it these days, but this is where someone needs to draw the line...



Prior to the popularization of the one-on-one fighting genre, the Double Dragon games reigned supreme on 8-Bit consoles. Now, Technos has gone back to the series' roots with Double Dragon, a translation of the low-profile sub-par Japanese Neo•Geo arcade fighter of the same name.

While not fabulous, Double Dragon does have a number of small features here and there which differentiate it from its peers. Lifebars are a superimposed mix of energy and charge meters, whereby energy decreases when you get hit and charge increases as you hit your opponent. Whenever charge equals energy, your character can execute special attacks or transform into a more powerful version of himself, and thus as your life is dwindling and you become more desperate, you get charged up more often—a nice touch. The backgrounds have more animation than does the average 2-D fighter, but everything else in the package is strictly average or slightly above average. There's a nice-looking but somewhat misplaced introductory FMV sequence taken directly from the DD movie, and while there are 10 playable characters, the average player versed in Street Fighter II should be able to knock everybody out after one or two full games. Characters have few moves and simple controls, and text is translated so poorly that even the game's licensor's name is spelled wrong in the credits. Music is energetic but not incredible, and audio effects are okay.

The only saving grace for DD is the "Tiny 3-D Mode" which lets you have one three-round fight against an opponent on a special pseudo 3-D version of any of the game's stages. Nice, but nothing groundbreaking.

If all of Double Dragon's elements had been brought together in a walk-and-punch fighter, people might have seen revolutionary possibilities for that declining genre. Sadly, in its current form, all that has been proven is that there hasn't been a world-beating Double Dragon game in years. IG

GRAPHICS: B-
+ Nice animated backgrounds and reasonable character artwork.
- Above 16-Bit standards but not quite up to 32-Bit or latter-day Capcom snuff.

SOUNDS: C+
+ Good audio quality for voices and music...
- ...but nothing sounds above average for the genre.

GAMEPLAY: C-
- Fewer moves than most fighters out there today.
+ Simple control, reasonable flow and air blocking.

LASTING POWER: D
- Poor, short endings.
- Easy to whip through the game for anyone save children.

OVERALL:
Intelligent Gamer "AVERAGE"

Killing Zone

Naxat's first 3-D fighting game is DOA

Publisher: Naxat Soft
Platform: PlayStation
Release: Now (Japan)





▲ While the polygon characters are very detailed, the animation is very choppy.



◀ Auto mode allows you to issue indirect commands to your character, highlighting the lack of computer intelligence.

Killing Zone for the PlayStation is the heir apparent to Naxat Soft's mediocre Japanese Saturn fighter, Battle Monsters. Unfortunately, Killing Zone isn't even as much fun as Battle Monsters, which mainly sold because it was one of the first 2-D fighting games available for the Saturn.

The game features two modes. Normal mode allows you to fight in your standard tournament-for-no-reason, either against the computer or an unfortunate human player. Auto mode allows the computer to decide which moves to use, with the player giving general orders like "attack" or "defend" to his or her chosen warrior. This mode really spotlights the lack of AI, since a great deal of the time both combatants will be just staring at each other...

The game stars seven generic movie monsters, from a standard balanced werewolf character to your typical slow, lumbering mummy.

The graphics appear detailed in still shots, with effective textures and a decent polygon count. However, that's about where it ends, since the game runs at a miserably choppy frame rate. It's obvious that Naxat didn't use motion capture for their characters, causing Killing Zone to approach unplayability.

Gameplay-wise, KZ is a complete mess. Characters have a severe lack of moves, causing some to have clear weaknesses. Add the sidestep button, and you have one seriously reactionary (and boring) fighting game.

One would think that most sane people would find very little in this game, especially since there are so many good 3-D fighting games on the PlayStation. It's apparent that Naxat doesn't understand the basic concepts behind the design of a fighter; perhaps the developers should be locked in a dark room with a Street Fighter II machine for a few months, and then they'll be able to figure it out... IG

GRAPHICS: C+
+ Fairly complex models and effective textures...
- ...running at a ludicrously bad frame rate.

SOUNDS: B-
+/- Music is typical for the genre.
- The announcer is pretty much unintelligible.

GAMEPLAY: C-
- Gameplay is reactionary.
- Characters lack a variety of moves.

LASTING POWER: C
- Computer AI is braindead, and the Two-player Mode doesn't save it.

OVERALL:
Intelligent Gamer "BELOW AVERAGE"

IG QUERIES

Q. ***Why did the Atari Jaguar crash and burn?***

Steven Mitchell
Denison, TX

A. A number of reasons. Any new game system needs the backing of great developers (both Japanese and Western), several exceptional titles, and central marketing muscle that can let the public know—and know quickly—that there are exciting new games on the way. Atari had some good (but not great) Western developers, virtually no Japanese developers, a limited marketing budget and only a handful of solid (but not world-beating) games. In addition, their reputation for failing to deliver software on time quite probably helped to hurt them in the eyes of the general public.

Q. ***I recently saw a grey Saturn control pad at Toys 'R' Us? Is this a Japanese pad? What's the deal? What's the difference?***

Willyum James Haley
Hawthorne, CA

A. Sega opted to release both types of Sega-designed Saturn control pads for the U.S. market—the grey control pad was designed for the Japanese marketplace and "smaller hands," and the black control pad was designed for the U.S. market's "larger hands" and supposed desire for sleek, ergonomic casings. Our comments on the functionality of each: The pad itself is easier to use on the U.S. controller, which also fits quite naturally into our hands. The Japanese controller's left and right buttons on top are more easily accessible, and the Japanese-style controller is also much easier to fit into younger players' hands.



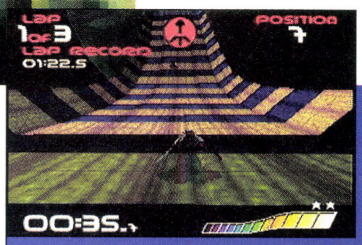
◀ Sega's Japanese Saturn pad is somewhat different than the black standard U.S. Saturn controller, most notably in its size and in the design of the "shoulder" buttons.

Q. ***1. Does Nintendo have any plans to release any games to combat the new Model 3 arcade board from Sega along with Virtua Fighter 3?***
2. I have heard that the M2 will have more polygon-crunching power than the N64, but will it feature the same features like the MIP-mapping and that other cool stuff?
3. Since Sony is porting some of its games to competing systems, could we possibly see a Toshinden 64, Destruction Derby 64, Twisted Metal 64, Wipeout 64, etc.?
4. Will Ultimate MK3+ be out for the U.S. launch of the N64?
5. Lastly, when will Donkey Kong Country 64 become a reality?

Joshua Singer
Newton, MA

A. Taking your questions in order:

1. Nintendo doesn't see the Model 3 arcade board as competition for the Nintendo 64 home game console—Model 3 has so overshot the rest of the games industry (home and arcade) technologically that even the best developers believe that they will not be able to duplicate VF3-style graphics at home for at least five years, if not more. Virtua Fighter 3, on the other hand, is a definite game to contend with, as Sega does intend to publish a Saturn port of VF3 in the near future, but Nintendo has that base covered: Their own fighting games will no doubt look closer to arcade machines than Sega's Fighting Vipers and VF3 ports will.
2. The M2 lacks hardware anti-aliasing but can compensate for it with other filtering techniques.
3. The easy answer is "yes," but there are a few factors worth considering: Sony has had it out for Nintendo since their collaborative effort failed to produce the SNES CD-ROM, and it's to the company's advantage to see Sega gain market share at Nintendo's expense. Of the titles you've mentioned, Sony directly controls the fate of only Twisted Metal, as it was developed specifically for Sony Interactive Studios America by SingleTrac. Both Destruction Derby and Wipeout are properties of Psygnosis, which has firmly established itself as a publisher of games for multiple platforms, and Toshinden is a joint product of Takara and Tamsoft (Sony solely published the U.S. PlayStation version; Sega the Saturn version, and Playmates the PC version). If any of the companies above sign on as developers for the Nintendo 64—and don't expect Sony to do it, but Psygnosis, Takara and SingleTrac are possibilities—you could see either sequels to the above games or entirely new products from the same people who created last year's hits.
4. For some months now, *Intelligent Gamer* has carried online reports about the state of the N64 version of MK3, which has faced a series of problems as a result of conflicting interests between Williams and Nintendo. Back when the machine was going to be released prior to late September, Williams apparently wanted to make a full port of either MK3 or UMK3, but cartridge size limitations imposed by Nintendo first made it seem impossible to squeeze MK3 into 64 megabits, and later UMK3 into 96 megs when Nintendo delayed the machine and allowed developers to use extra space. It currently appears that Williams will release Mortal Kombat Trilogy for the N64, which will feature more palette-swapped ninjas than you can shake a stick at.
5. Probably one year from now, when they are ready to take the DKC emphasis away from the SNES and make the characters into fully 3-D actors.



▲ Wipeout is just one of the Psygnosis-designed games that have made it on other platforms (Saturn version pictured).

Q. ***Let me start off by saying that your Web site and magazine have become my only source of gaming info—I don't even bother with anything else. Now for my question: Do companies such as Capcom, Square and Sega buy story lines to games and/or game concepts from game players? I have an original story line for an RPG game ready but I lack both the necessary skill and talent to create an entire game from scratch. Is there a site I can visit or a place I can mail my ideas to so that companies can receive them? I know there might be copyright problems that would occur if I did so but I really need to know. Thanks.***

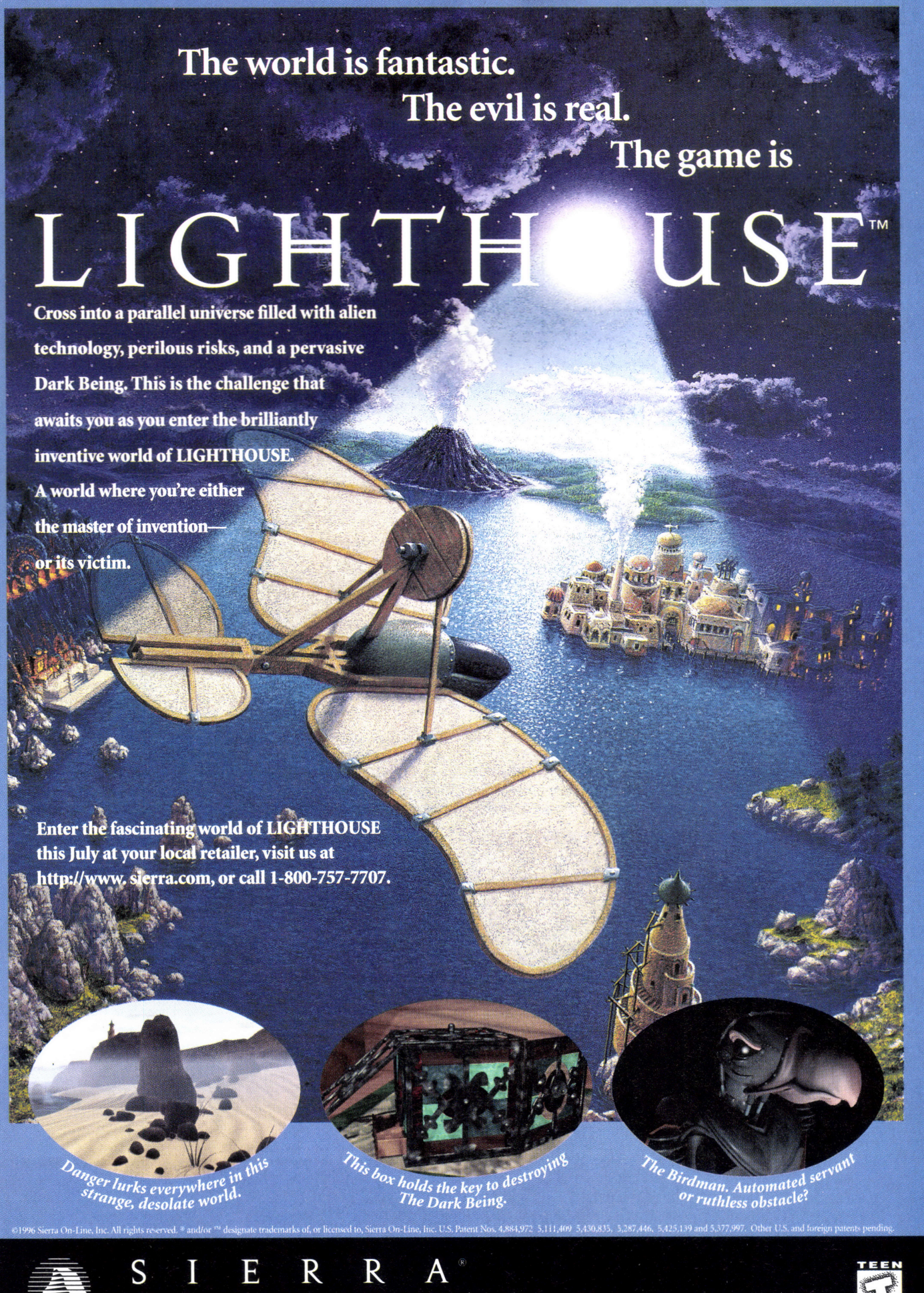
Kabir Hemrajani
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

A Thanks! The quick answer to your question is "no," and generally speaking, companies don't even like to receive unsolicited game concepts lest lawsuits begin when they actually release similar titles. The best angle for you to consider would be getting a job with a small but established software development house, where your idea might be listened to and perhaps eventually developed. Larger developers are often the repositories for hundreds of game concepts which never actually get made into games.

Send your questions to:
IG Queries,

by e-mail ***at iglee@aol.com,***
subject line: IG Queries

or *by mail at*
1920 Highland Avenue, Suite 222
Lombard, IL 60148



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CLASSIC GAMING

Old games come back into style as nostalgia hits the video gaming industry. IG takes a look back...

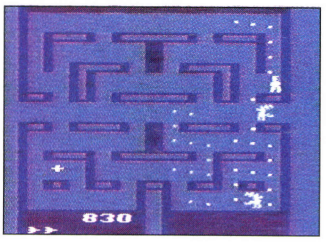
A wonderful revival of sorts is in progress, though we would hardly have realized it had we stayed in the clean suburban malls where most games are bought and sold. We're in the middle of a rebirth of classic gaming, made possible by three prime factors: The low prices of software from the declining 8- and 16-Bit game markets, the persistence of the interactive entertainment industry to the point at which different eras of games could exist, and the wide-scale availability of mass quantities of old software and hardware at flea markets, garage sales and thrift shops around the country.

Though it was trendy several years ago for magazines to describe any game with good sales potential as an "instant classic," truly classic games are made, not born. People enjoyed games such as Defender, Asteroids, Pac-Man and Donkey Kong when they were released, but they became classics only after years had passed without the release of more successful direct competitors. Sure, companies attempted to clone Pac-Man, but no one remembers the clones—20th Century Fox, for example, made a weak attempt to marry the Pac-Man interface with the *Alien* movie license. The types of differences which exist between Super Mario, Sonic the Hedgehog and Bubsy the Bobcat are enough to ensure which will be classic and which will be all but forgotten 10 years from now.

EMULATION

Now that PowerPC and Pentium chips are filling the computer hardware world with processors that are hundreds of times as powerful as those commonly used in the early 1980s, a new classic game-collecting strategy has begun: emulation. Over the last couple of years, Activision released their Atari 2600 Action Packs, packaged PC- and Mac-compatible clusters of old 2600 titles released by the company more than 10 years ago, and in recent days, they've also released a bunch of Atari's own classic 2600 games in their original formats.

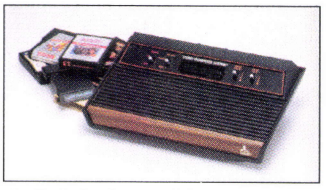
As most people realize, you can't just take a 2600 cartridge and plug it into a Mac, nor for that matter could people take an Amiga disk program and run it on a PC. The key to Activision's product is a piece of software called an emulator, which allows the PC or Mac to run original 2600 cartridge code that has been transferred from cartridge to disk. While people for years have been able to buy "Mac-compatibility" cards for PCs and vice versa, the cards normally cost hundreds of dollars because they pack many of the original computer's chips onto a plug-in board. What's impressive about emulation software is that you need no special boards to run other computers' software—the PC or Mac's



▲ 20th Century Fox's Alien is a rip-off of Pac-Man that replaces the pellet-gobbler and ghosts with movie-character sprites.









▲ Clockwise from top-left: Coleco's ColecoVision system, Mattel Electronics' Intellivision Master Component (Intellivision II shown here), the battery-operated Atari Telegames Pong console, and finally, the infamous machine that started it all; The Atari Video Computer System (VCS), more popularly known as "The 2600."

The Best and Worst of the Bunch

Hundreds of games are available for the old machines, but only 30 or 40 for any machine could really be classified as classic or worthwhile. Among the hottest: Atari's classic 2600 action-RPG Adventure, the brick-breaking Breakout and Super Breakout, the cynically misnamed Pong clone Video Olympics, the classic dot-gobbler Ms. Pac-Man (skip Pac-Man), the arcade conversions of Berzerk, Crystal Castles and Jungle Hunt, their early licensed title Superman and finally their 1986 3-D shooter Solaris. Almost every classic Activision game is worth trying, especially Pitfall II, and a few CBS games such as Wizard of Wor and Gorf are great. (One prized cartridge, Q-Bert's Qubes, is both exceedingly rare and fun to play.) For the Coleco, many titles from Donkey Kong and Donkey Kong Jr. to Mr. Do, Mr. Do's Castle and even the Smurfs are fun to play.

True dogs are numerous, but the rare ones can be worth money, even if they're sickeningly horrible: Mystique's now-classic lineup of pornographic 2600 titles includes such brown gems as Custer's Revenge (avoid arrows, rape Indian squaw), Bachelor Party and Beat 'em and Eat 'em—mostly just variations on old game themes with 2600-quality porno graphics—and titles such as Cathouse Blues, Jungle Fever, Knight on the Town and Philly Flasher are supposed to be part of their lineup as well. By contrast, Mythicon's Sorcerer, Atari's 2600 Krull and some of the simplistic word and number game titles are abysmal finds, but probably won't be worth much even 10 years down the line.

First Timer's Advice

* If you're looking to collect Atari games, pick up both a 7800 and a 5200—the two machines together can play all of Atari's console conversions from the late '70s to the '80s.

* Always purchase your machines with power supplies and, where appropriate, video cables. Atari 5200 and 7800 power supplies are tricky to locate properly, and ColecoVision power supplies have a high rate of failure. Remember that older game systems and Pong machines put out a composite video signal which may require you to use an old manual "TV/GAME" RF modulator and purchase a cheap, tiny Radio Shack female-to-female signal adapter as well.

* Some games will be nearly unplayable without instructions—be wary of Absolute titles such as F-14 Tomcat and Atari games including Indiana Jones and E.T.

* Get receipts just in case the machine or games don't work.

* Set your expectations low — if you expect that the dusty old system you've just purchased for a dollar is definitely going to work, you might be in for a sad surprise. On the other hand, if it fires up without a problem, you've just gotten a great deal.

internal chips pretend to behave just like their primitive ancestors.

More amazing is the fact that emulators have recently emerged for PCs and Macs to run Intellivision and ColecoVision games, which are often steps beyond their 2600 predecessors in both aesthetics and gameplay. Over 60 old Coleco games from the Cabbage Patch Kids to the Dukes of Hazzard to the Smurfs have started to circulate on the Internet, though Pentium and Power PC chips are really necessities to run the games at their original speeds. Best of all, early machines from the 2600 to the NES are the only ones that can claim to have run hot current arcade titles made by Atari, Nintendo, Sega and Bally/Midway/Williams: Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Junior, Zaxxon are available for both the 2600 and ColecoVision, and Atari's entire 2600 library (including such classics as Joust, Defender and Berzerk) runs on the Coleco machine as well.

One of the challenges facing people who want to use their PCs to play old games is the well-established body of copyright law which will likely smack some fans of emulation in the face. Though the long-gone Coleco is unlikely to mount a challenge to prevent people from playing ColecoVision Baseball or the Smurfs, companies still making games may well find duplication of their old titles somewhat objectionable. Considering that companies such as Williams and Namco are currently making profits by repackaging old games such as Robotron, Joust, Defender, Pac-Man, Dig Dug and Pole Position, and especially with the knowledge that Nintendo has been extremely active over the years in preventing the counterfeiting and duplication of both NES and SNES cartridges, emulation could potentially cease with the current crop of 16-Bit games.

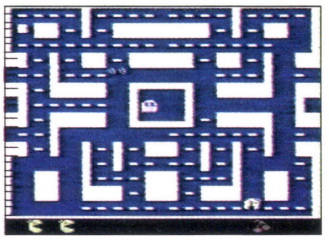
Or perhaps not. When publishers decide to market their past successes for different platforms, they can either completely reprogram the original game (a time-consuming process) for the new machine or attempt to develop an emulator that runs the original code. In an attempt to market their older 16-Bit titles for personal computers, Sega developed Genesis emulation software for Pentiums which runs only specific games from Comix Zone to Ecco the Dolphin to Sonic-CD but could hypothetically be expanded to run almost every game in the Genesis library. Will the same thing happen with Saturn games five or 10 years from now?

Why can't an emulator run every game produced for a system? Though most 2600 games will run quite well under emulation, a handful of special customized cartridges prove challenging to convert. CBS Electronics and a few other companies added extra RAM into their cartridges to improve the quality of the on-screen artwork, which even at best (as you might imagine) isn't exactly stellar by today's standards. Therefore, games that use special chips and special peripherals (including extra RAM, Sega's one-shot Virtua Racing SVP chip, Nintendo's SNES FX and SA-1 chips, and all sorts of special gadgets from ColecoVision steering wheels and NES Power Pads, Light Guns and ROB the Robot) would demand plenty of special programming work on the part of the emulator.

COLLECTING

Ever since newer machines first began to steal the spotlight from older hardware, small pockets of collectors around the country have realized the possible value of actually physically owning games and consoles which one day might be rare. With the help of other people who just want to start fun collections or avoid the hassles and occasional price tags of emulation, the market for classic game hardware and software has been steadily growing over the last five or 10 years.

Sure, it's exciting to download a set of 50 old Coleco games at once and sift through aged titles from Antarctic Adventure to Miner 2049er, but there's a lot to be said for the other variant on the classic



▲ Ms. Pac-Man was one of the biggest hits of the early '80s, even though the early home systems couldn't do a near-perfect arcade port until the NES days.

game-collecting experience. Given that there are over 500 different games for the 2600 alone, there's great fun to be had by starting a collection from nothing—say, Combat, Pac-Man, Asteroids and Space Invaders—and spending weekends building it up slowly. Aware of this fact, many of the industry's long-time devotees—including people who make their living creating and playing games for Nintendo, Sega and Sony—make occasional trips to flea markets and garage sales looking for relics of gaming history.

What's the best stuff to look for? There are a thousand answers to that question, many of them inspired by the classic collectors' paradoxes: [A] Since few people buy bad games, the worst games can ironically become the hardest to find and thus the most valuable; and [B] as companies generally get better at making software, their rarest games are either those bad ones made early on or the small quantities of good games that only a few people got their hands on. Alternatively, if you're just looking to collect the best games, you can skip most of the trash and go straight to the great titles. IG

Pricing and Availability

After consulting long-time collectors and determining relative values for used game hardware and software, *IG* recently stopped by a couple of flea markets to see the actual low prices classic games can sell for. Most Atari 2600, ColecoVision and Intellivision games can be had for a dollar or two a piece, though many flea market vendors set the prices in the $5 range simply to give themselves room for profit and bargaining power. Old Atari, Coleco and Intellivision consoles (including working power supplies, a necessity) sell for $10-20 with or without controllers ($2-4). NES titles cost between $5-20, and used Genesis and SNES cartridges hover around the $10-30 range. Garage sale and thrift shop prices can dip even lower: 2600 games could go for a quarter a pop, for example, and hardware can fall into the $5 range for really old machines. Everything listed above can be commonly found at flea markets.

Today's most prized systems and games are those which never caught on years ago (hear that, Virtual Boy collectors?), but still had their unique features. The cream of the crop is GCE's Vectrex, a home machine with a custom vector graphics television set built in, and which (like the famed Asteroids and Tempest arcade games) produced visuals that relied entirely on lines to draw pictures rather than individual dots (pixels). Vectrex machines range in price from $20-125 depending on the people selling them, and software is scarce: One Internet source has obtained permission from GCE to sell (without profit) multigame cartridges containing every game and test product released for the machine. Sticker price? Almost $100.



▲ The Vectrex

by Brian Osserman

GAME DEV

One of the Internet's greatest strengths is the way in which it facilitates communication between users. One of the most pleasant side effects of this is that one doesn't have to spend much time on the Internet, pursuing a given interest, before running into some variety celebrity who would otherwise be completely inaccessible.

While this is true of just about any area of interest (for instance, Tom Clancy frequents the Usenet group devoted to his books), it is most true of video games, where a large number of developers are active participants on Usenet and very accessible by e-mail. However, tracking down a given developer on Usenet can often be rather difficult, and there are a number of developers who are accessible on the Internet but who don't participate in newsgroup discussions. The World Wide Web provides a simple solution: Nearly every major game developer now has a Web site–such sites are easy to track down, and they often provide a wide variety of informative and/or entertaining tidbits, in the form of text, pictures or even movies. If you're lucky, a company Web site may have the right information to let you get in touch with the developers.



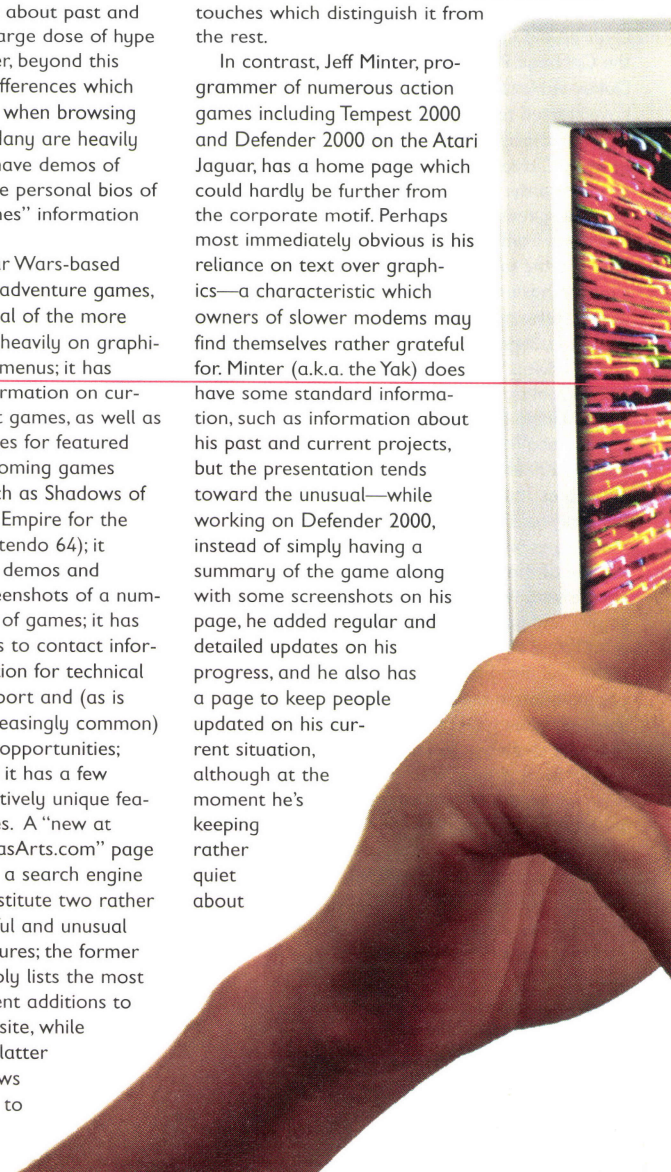
▲ LucasArts' Web site provides a plethora of information and resources about their complete lineup of games–including past, present and future titles.

There is a wide variety of developer pages on the Web, ranging from very professional and rather impersonal corporate pages such as those of LucasArts to the very down-to-earth and often off-the-beaten-path pages of many smaller companies, with Jeff Minter's home page falling solidly at this end of the spectrum. All developer pages have a certain amount in common: They contain information about past and present games, and usually a large dose of hype for upcoming projects. However, beyond this there are a large number of differences which immediately become apparent when browsing the various developer pages. Many are heavily dependent on graphics, some have demos of upcoming products, others have personal bios of developers, or "behind-the-scenes" information on game development.

If you're lucky, a company Web site may have the right information to let you get in touch with the developers themselves.

▲ LucasArts, developers of Star Wars-based games as well as a number of adventure games, have a site which is fairly typical of the more corporate Web pages: It relies heavily on graphical menus; it has information on current games, as well as pages for featured upcoming games (such as Shadows of the Empire for the Nintendo 64); it has demos and screenshots of a number of games; it has links to contact information for technical support and (as is increasingly common) job opportunities; and it has a few relatively unique features. A "new at LucasArts.com" page and a search engine constitute two rather useful and unusual features; the former simply lists the most recent additions to the site, while the latter allows you to search all the pages on the site for key words. The site also has something which has become fairly typical for corporate Web pages: online versions of all the recent press releases. Finally, the site has electronic issues of *The Adventurer*, a LucasArts publication which contains previews of upcoming attractions as well as interviews with developers and various LucasArts-related news stories. Most corporate sites are modeled similarly to that of LucasArts, although there are a few aspects which are rather variable, and each tends to have one or two distinctive touches which distinguish it from the rest.

In contrast, Jeff Minter, programmer of numerous action games including Tempest 2000 and Defender 2000 on the Atari Jaguar, has a home page which could hardly be further from the corporate motif. Perhaps most immediately obvious is his reliance on text over graphics—a characteristic which owners of slower modems may find themselves rather grateful for. Minter (a.k.a. the Yak) does have some standard information, such as information about his past and current projects, but the presentation tends toward the unusual—while working on Defender 2000, instead of simply having a summary of the game along with some screenshots on his page, he added regular and detailed updates on his progress, and he also has a page to keep people updated on his current situation, although at the moment he's keeping rather quiet about

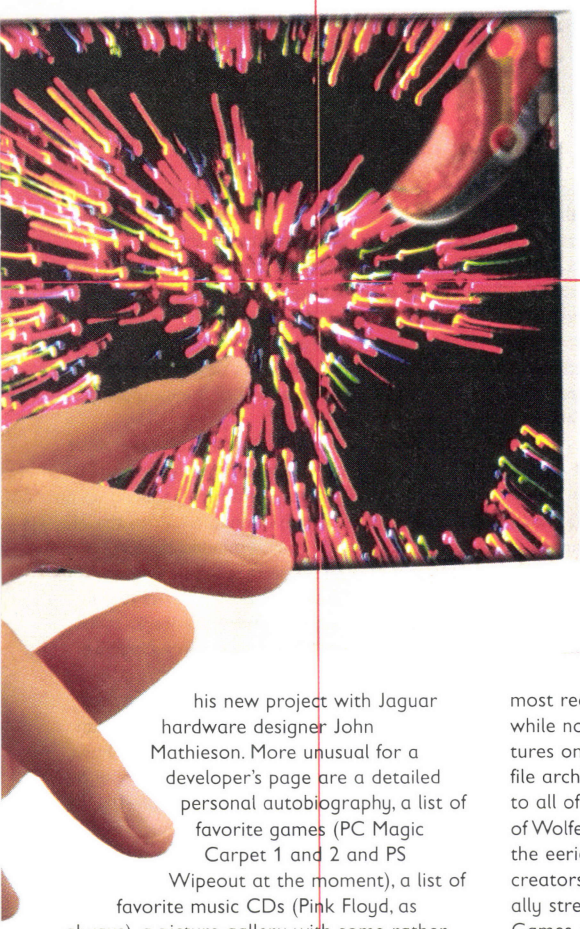


A Small Sampling of Developer Links

Beyond Games	http://www.beyondgames.com
Blizzard	http://www.blizzard.com
Boss	http://www.bossgame.com
Bullfrog	http://www.ea.com/bullfrog/bullfrog.html
Crystal Dynamics	http://www.crystald.com
High Voltage	http://www.high-voltage.com
Hyperimage	http://www.hyperimage.com
id Software	http://www.idsoftware.com
Jane's	http://www.ea.com/janes
Maxis	http://www.maxis.com
Jeff Minter	http://www.magicnet.net/~yak
LucasArts	http://www.lucasarts.com
Origin	http://www.ea.com/origin/english
Paradigm	http://www.paradigmsim.com
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Westwood	http://www.westwood.com

ELOPERS ON THE WEB

The Internet lets you meet the Makers...



his new project with Jaguar hardware designer John Mathieson. More unusual for a developer's page are a detailed personal autobiography, a list of favorite games (PC Magic Carpet 1 and 2 and PS Wipeout at the moment), a list of favorite music CDs (Pink Floyd, as always), a picture gallery with some rather... unusual...entries (sheep and llamas are the order of the day), a list of items Yak is looking for (anyone know where one can find a good Peruvian jumper?), a page of random pieces of software to download (yep, PC Llamatron is there) and finally his e-mail address. While this page is certainly rather far off the beaten path, it is not too unusual to find more personal information on the pages of smaller games companies.

As mentioned before, most sites have something distinctive to offer. Parallax has put together a slide show with pictures and information on their most recent release, Descent II. id Software, while not having any particularly unusual features on their site, does have a very extensive file archive, with screenshots, demos and patches to all of their games, and even the source code of Wolfenstein 3D. Of course, their site also has the eerie look one would expect out of the creators of Doom, with skulls and eyeballs liberally strewn across the various pages. Beyond Games, makers of Battlewheels for the Atari Lynx and Ultra Vortek for the Jaguar, has an extensive look behind the scenes at the creation of Ultra Vortek, including a number of shots of both actors and stop-action models.

Origin offers their Web page in German as well as English, while Ubi Soft offers their page in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

So how does one find a developer's Web site? Well, we've included a list of the sites of a number of developers, but there are way too many to list all of them, so naturally you'll want to know how to find sites on your own. Luckily, the large number of high-quality Web searchers make finding a particular developer's page a relatively easy task.



▲ Game Developers Boss Game Studios just recently unveiled their new Web site, chock-full of info about the company and their upcoming Saturn/PS title, Spider.

Alta Vista (http://altavista.digital.com) is a particularly good search engine for tracking down hard-to-find sites, since it actually searches through the text of each page. However, for relatively well-known developers, Alta Vista will return way too many pages to conveniently search through, so it is often easier to use a more limited engine such as Infoseek (http://guide.infoseek.com).

Whether you're looking for information on a specific game, information on a specific developer or simply an amusing way to waste time effectively, game developers' pages on the Web can often provide just what you want.

The Medium Is the Message

The Medium Is *My* Message

by Arnie Katz

The battle between plastic and silicon is as old as electronic gaming. Nintendo keeps the cartridge alive and claims numerous advantages for silicon. Sony, Sega and 3DO think that mylar can keep the N64 cartridge console from steamrolling the video game market.

Electronic gaming magazines don't give much space to data storage media. Two reasons: Gamers seldom think about media, and it looks like a dull topic. After all, it's the program that counts, not the disc or cart. Who gets excited about the Acme Pastel-Colored Disk line, now with mint-flavored label glue?

The subject is worth a second look. The disc and the cartridge represent two utterly different approaches to putting interactive entertainment on the home screen.

Game consoles developed from hard-wired Pong units. The chips in the console hold the game program. Hit the "on" switch, and there's Pong!

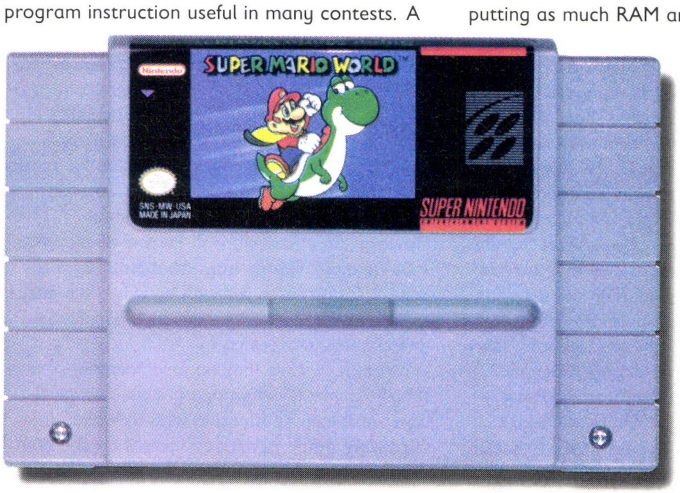
Hard-wired devices faced a marketing problem in the '70s. To sell a game, companies had to sell a whole machine. Pong could sell for under $50, but manufacturers foresaw trouble. The public wanted more graphics, sound and gameplay, which required more chips. Increased prices would be the inevitable result. No one thought consumers would stand for a single-purpose game that cost $100 or more.

The solution seemed obvious to video gaming pioneers. The chips in the console could contain program instruction useful in many contests. A plug-in could add game-specific code. Magnavox tried this in primitive form with the original Odyssey, and RCA and Fairchild brought out products that did a little better without actually being successful.

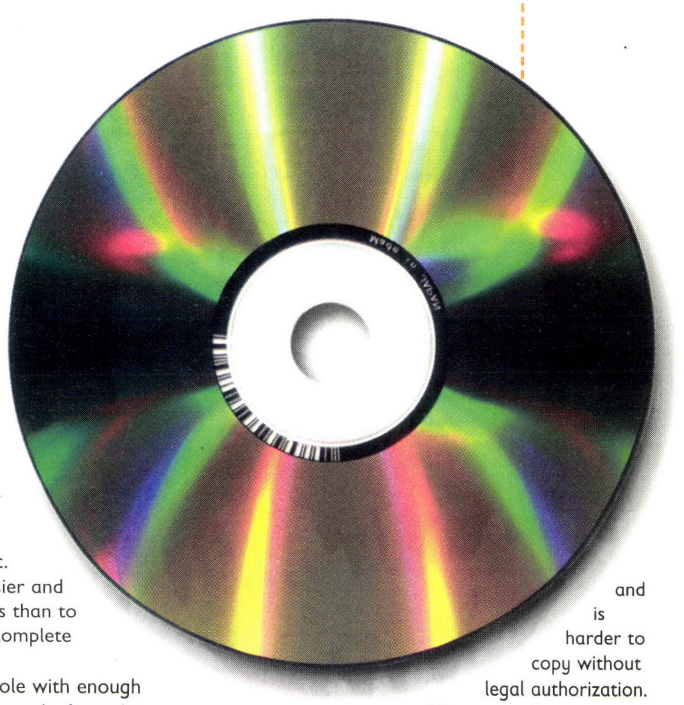
Finally, in the late '70s, Bally (Bally Arcade), Atari (2600) and Magnavox (Odyssey2) produced programmable video game consoles that finally put the concept over with the public. Gamers saw that it was easier and cheaper to switch cartridges than to buy new controllers and a complete chip set for every new title.

No one ever built a console with enough memory. Just about every console, from the Atari 2600 to the SNES, required a memory boost after a year or so. Since there was no way to add memory to the console, the extra chips went into the cartridges. The features added to one generation of hardware with cartridges become part of the basic box in the next generation. Then those clever programmers come up with a bunch of swell stuff that has to be added to those machines in the game carts.

Computers are based on the idea that one machine should perform many activities. Hardware architecture has always emphasized putting as much RAM and ROM, video image processing, sound processing and such in the system. Programs don't need to add memory or other functionality, so they contain only lines of code that direct the chips in the computer to combine in the desired way.



The advantage of the cartridge is access speed. The program is there, instantly. The medium is relatively durable, can't break down due to miniscule scratches or abrasions and is harder to copy without legal authorization.



Those are the reasons the Nintendo 64 will debut at the end of September with cart-based games. The Big N believes that its young customers don't prefer to mess with CD-ROM technology. It is banking on lightning-fast access and the speed and power of the N64 itself to help its titles like Mario Brothers 64 to leap ahead of the stumbling 32-Bit stuff.

It becomes increasingly clear, however, that Nintendo's loyalty to silicon has its limits. The company's executives are already talking up an optical drive for the Nintendo 64. With the M2 technology, jointly masterminded by 3DO Company and Matsushita, coming to market in a variety of formats, Nintendo knows it will need to offer bigger-memory games to stay competitive once silicon gives it a jackrabbit start this year.

Price is the secret ingredient. Since a disc contains no expensive silicon chips, it is much cheaper. A blockbuster SNES title might have $25 in chips, manufacturer's cost. The same outfit can buy a blank disc for $1-2. When the fight for market share heats up, disc games for $29 will have a tremendous edge over top-of-the-line carts at $79.

Will plastic wipe out silicon in gameware? That seems likely, but the victory will be short-lived. Other forms of delivery, especially cable and online will bite deep into plastic's dominance within the next few years. IG



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E3 After Hours







◀ While each of the "big three" game companies tried their best to out do each other with their party entertainment, some tried harder than others. Last year Sony had Michael Jackson–this year Huey Lewis! Sega wowed 'em with ex-Stray Cat Brian Setzer, while Nintendo offered a fabulous in-door circus.

Everybody knows that E³ has filled up the Los Angeles Convention Center with games for the last two years, but most people have no idea what journalists go through before the show begins, when the displays close at 6 p.m. each evening, and when the show has ended at 4 p.m. on the last day.

PARTIES! And plenty of them. Large game companies allocate tens of thousands of dollars to wine, dine and entertain a crowd of business associates, journalists and retailers for several hours during an evening or two of the show, which regularly results in crowds of intoxicated sales reps and company executives accidentally blabbing about their secret upcoming products to slightly less-intoxicated reporters. Ironically, many journalists show up at the big E³ parties partially to avoid having to pay for meals, and mostly because of the open bars, which continue to dispense pricey mixed drinks for hours at no charge to the attendees. What were this year's hottest invites? Let's take a look.

Nintendo: The Biltmore Bowl, May 15

Following their exciting Nintendo 64 unveiling and press conference, Nintendo spread members of the famed French circus troupe Cirque D' Soleil throughout several of the ballroom areas of the luxurious Biltmore Hotel. The intentionally dark and man-made misty atmosphere was punctured frequently by bursts of colorful lasers and other lights, all of which were part of Nintendo's "Magical" theme for the event.

Specializing in acts of contortion, precision balancing, juggling and other creative uses of the human body, most of the gang from Cirque occupied multiple stages on the periphery of a ballroom and in a couple of side rooms, putting on their acts for the crowd. Other members of the cast walked through the ballroom and either teased, chased or performed in front of attendees, who were busy scarfing down a combination of Chinese appetizers, fresh sushi and—you guessed it—mixed drinks. *IG*'s Biltmore highlight: After seeing Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto demonstrating the incredible Super Mario 64 only hours earlier, we spotted Mr. M quietly walking around the outside patio away from all of the noise and crowds.

Sega: The House of Blues, May 15

Before the show began and following the start of Nintendo's party by a couple of hours, Sega packed the famed Los Angeles-area House of Blues with people and set loose dancers, an exciting live band, and... Tom Kalinske? That's right, Sega's prominent front man took the stage in Blues Brothers suit-hat-and-sunglasses regalia to personally address many of the audience's Sega-related concerns and perceptions, namely their understanding that the Saturn was being outsold and outgunned by the PlayStation. Jeered by the crowd after showing a videotape that suggested that the Saturn was more powerful than the PlayStation because it has "three 32-Bit processors," Kalinske was doing fine when he showed a trade show-only commercial jabbing Nintendo's Mario character and a video presentation of Aoi from Virtua Fighter 3—the former two smacked of trickery and underpreparedness, while the latter went back to Sega's roots by delivering savvy commercial designs and better-looking games than the competition.

And, of course, there were a number of foods and liquids to consume, though the bar was perpetually packed with people and there was barely enough room to squeeze through the crowds. After Mr. K left the stage, a group of Sega dancers came out to jam to the taped beat of J.J. Fad's old rap track "SuperSonic," and former Stray Cats lead singer Brian Setzer brought his new band up to give a live performance for the crowd. *IG*'s favorite moment at the House of Blues: Tom Kalinske's introduction of a couple of Sega's Japanese-born executives, who were spotlighted in the crowd wearing full Blues Brothers outfits. Classy stuff.



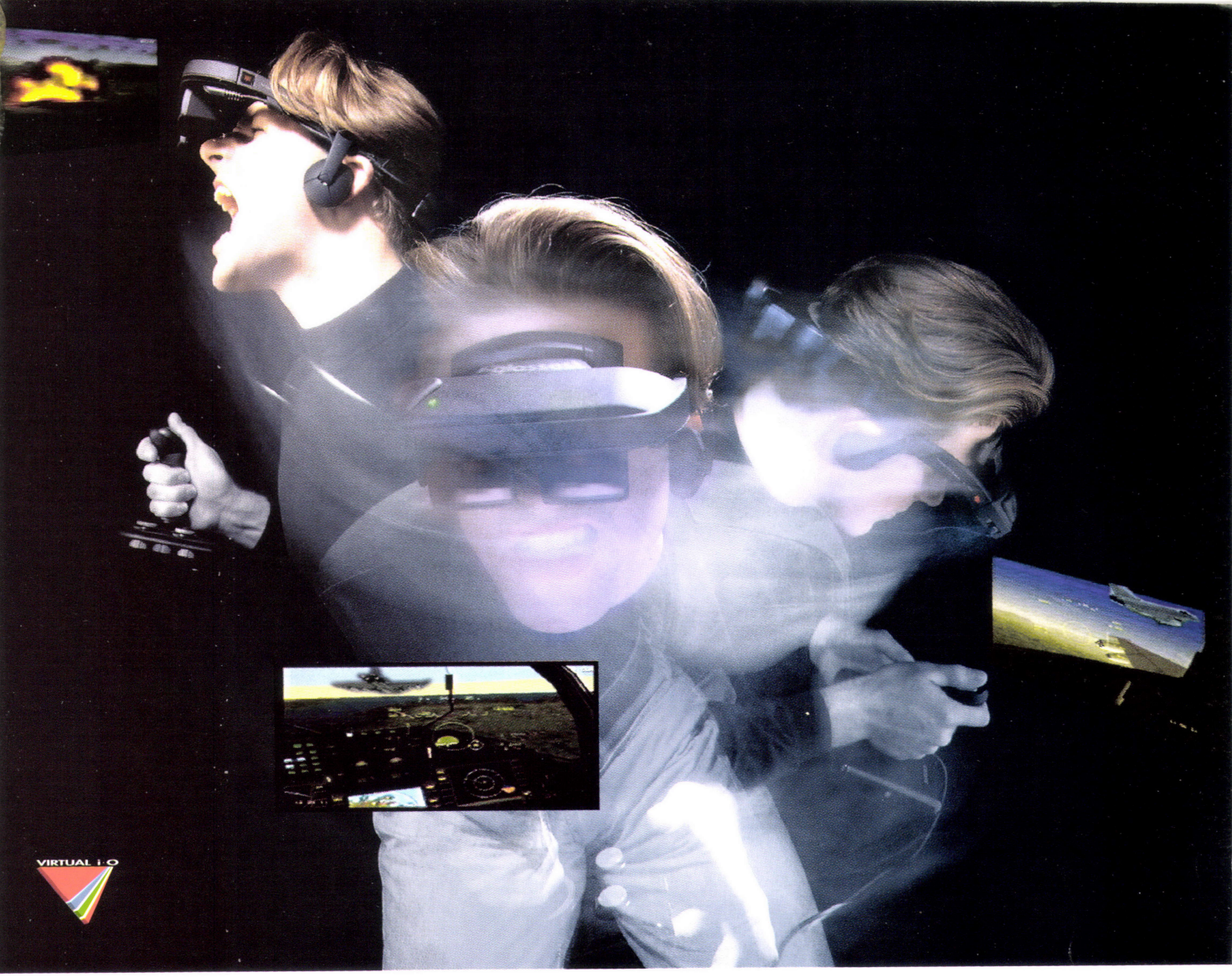
Sony: The Museum of Flying, May 16

Though they had a live band (Huey Lewis and some backup) playing and a museum filled with airplane exhibits and simulation rides, Sony's party became much more of a social event than the others as there was adequate room to walk around, breathe and take advantage of piles of sushi, multiple appetizers, and, needless to say, several open bars with plenty of beverages on hand. Scattered around the museum and the tents outside were SNK's Fatal Fury Real Bout, Samurai Shodown 3 and King of Fighters '95 arcade machines, several kiosks with PlayStation titles such as Crash Bandicoot, and a number of other arcade games either ready or planned for future release.

IG's highlight of the Sony bash: Planes taking off on a nearby airstrip as we comfortably gnoshed on spicy tortillas, sushi and a handful of delicious chocolate desserts.

Miscellaneous Party Highlights

Of course these weren't the only parties of the show, but they were the main events. Honorable mentions go out to SegaSoft's freaky "Sacred Pools" bash, which hosted industrial band My Life With the Thrill Kill Kult (not to mention tons of beautiful women and free alcohol), and Eidos Interactive, whose shindig at the Atlas Bar & Grill had much potential, but was just way too crowded. We've also got to thank Matt Atwood at Working Designs for treating both us and the staff of *Game Informer* to a wonderful evening of drinking and a beautiful waitress named "Victoria." Cheers!



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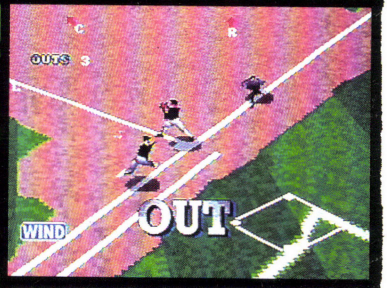
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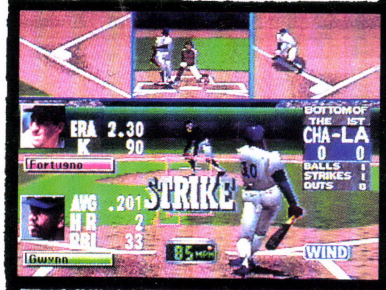
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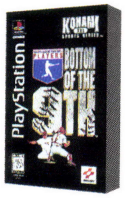
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